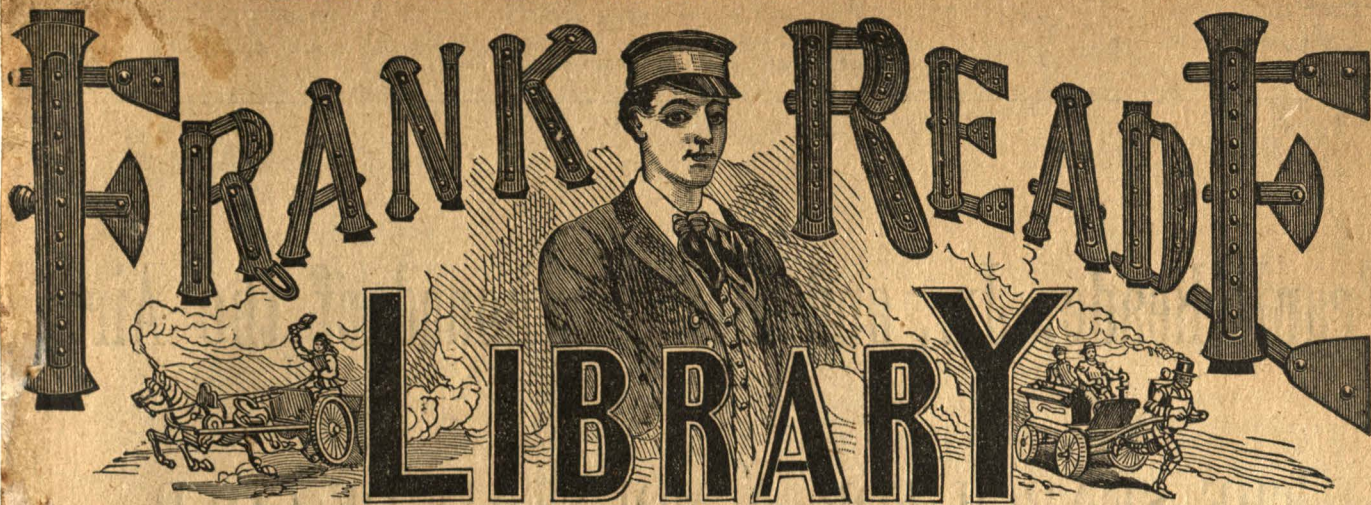


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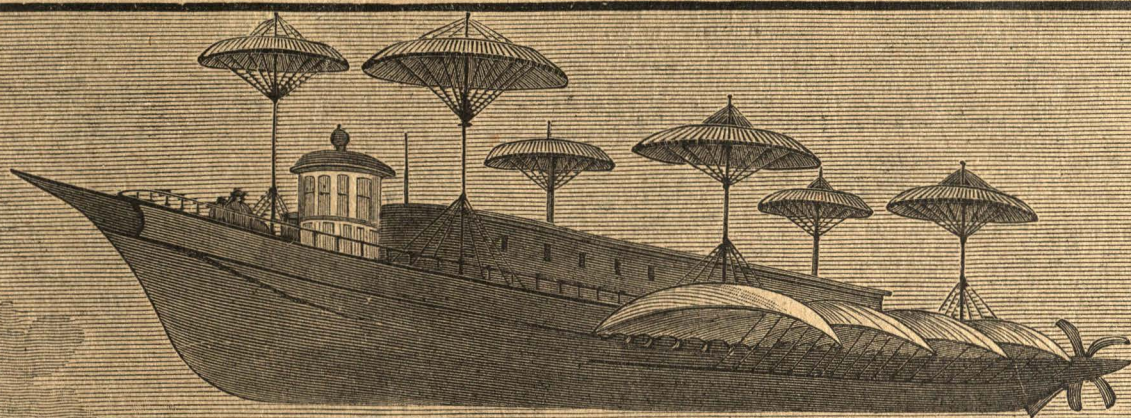
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Frank Reade, Jr.,

And His Greyhound of the Air;
or, The Search for a Mountain of Gold.

By "NONAME."



With a horrible look in his blood-shot eyes Despard uttered a yell of terror, bounded up on the railing and sprang off. Down to the sea hurled his body, and, striking the waves, it sunk like a shot.

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Frank Reade, Jr., and His Greyhound of the Air:

OR,

THE SEARCH FOR A MOUNTAIN OF GOLD.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Chased Across the Sahara; or, The Bedouin's Captive," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD SAILOR'S STORY.

A QUIET monotony had been existing in Readestown for nearly a year after the return of its most celebrated inhabitant, Frank Reade, Jr., from his last journey in the clouds, on a wonderful flying machine he invented.

In the intervening year the young inventor's fertile brain had devised a newer and more wonderful piece of mechanism than his last had been though.

It was in the month of June when our story opens, and Frank's father and wife had gone to spend a few weeks in Chicago, leaving Frank behind, with only the two famous friends of their many strange adventures, Barney O'Shea, the rollicking Irishman, and that practical joker, the comical old negro, Pomp.

Toward the close of a warm afternoon, Frank had given the darky several letters to mail at the village post-office, and then left the house for a short walk down the road.

The negro started off, whistling a camp-meeting melody, and upon passing a fence, a shower of old tomato cans, boots, and rubbish flew over the top, all over him.

He uttered a wild shout of dismay, flung up his hands and fell down.

The next moment a head popped up on the other side of the fence, and the broadly-grinning face of Barney appeared, looking down at him.

The negro and Irishman were incessantly diverting themselves by playing practical jokes upon each other, and Barney expected to see Pomp go rushing pell-mell down the road, frightened half into a fit.

But when he observed instead, the still, immovable figure of the old coon lying rigidly in the dust, with his dilapidated straw hat jammed down over his head, he imagined at once that he had seriously injured him.

The grin fled from his face, a serious look of alarm and solicitude taking its place, and at a single bound he landed in the road, and bent over his old friend, gasping:

"Begob, I've kilt ther naygur!"

This dismaying fear had hardly entered his mind when suddenly Pomp's fist shot upwards, and struck him upon the nose.

A million constellations of bright stars seemed to flash up before Barney's eyes as he clapped his hand to his face and sprang up.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pomp, scrambling to his feet. "Yo' done tink yo' berry smart, didn't yo', huh? Coteh dis nigga playin' 'possum dat time, yo' white trash! We'se quits now fo' shuah!"

Barney wilted, for he saw that he had been caught in his own trap, and he might have retaliated, but just then another matter occurred to attract the attention of both of them.

There sounded the roar of many angry voices around a bend in the road ahead, sounding like the enraged cries of an excited rabble, and a gruff and bluff voice rising above the tumult, as if entreating for mercy and begging to be heard.

"Be ther poker av Moses!" gasped Barney, in alarm, "what's that?"

"Pears like's if dere was a fight," said Pomp, listening intently.

Just then an old sailor rushed around the bend, hotly pursued by a gang of men, all of whom were evidently bent upon capturing him by force of a struggle, or resort to the weapons they carried.

"He's the murderer! Collar him!" shouted one of the men. "There's a hundred dollars reward offered! The detective said he wore a uniform!"

"Blow me but I ain't!" shouted the old sailor, wildly, as he came to a pause in the road, an excited look upon such of his bronzed and weather-beaten face that was not covered by a short gray beard he wore. "I'm Matt Mainbrace, by gol, an' I never done no feller critter no harm in this blessed world. Avast thar now, my hearties, an' bear down on the right craft, fer this old hulk ain't done no harm."

Just then a short, thin man, with a black mustache, appeared and dashed through the roaring crowd, which was rushing upon the old tar like a mountain avalanche.

He glanced at the old mariner a moment.

"Stand back!" he cried to the crowd. "This isn't the man. Harry Howard, the fellow who shot Ralph Despard in a duel in New York, is a young man of twenty-two. He is in a bicycling costume."

The crowd slunk back sullenly and the old sailor grinned.

"The chap who shot the balloonist must be in some other part of the town," added the short, thin detective. "That he is here I am positive, for I tracked him myself. Now, scatter—hurry!"

The detective and the gang of roughs whom he had bribed to aid him run the fugitive down hurried away.

The old sailor was left standing in the middle of the road glancing ruefully after them, and Barney gained a good glance at him.

"Begob, it's ther crazy aould sailor!" he exclaimed. "Don't yer remember ther loikes av him, Pomp? Shure an' he's ther wan who kem here yistherda', axin' fer Frank Reade, Jr., an' a-givin' us ther devil's own cock-an'-bull story av a moighty mountain av gold that he wants ter foind somewheres in Australly."

"Fo' de Lawd, he am de same one. Done gone crazy, fo' shuah!" said Pomp, nodding his kinky head and grinning. "S'pose we'se gwine fo' ter le' dis chance pass by, Barney—hey, chile?"

He tapped his forehead and winked so knowingly that Barney could not fail to understand that

he wanted to put up a job of some kind on the old sailor, and they began to whisper.

Just then the bushes parted beside the road a short distance further on, and Frank Reade, Jr., and a very handsome young man in a bicycle costume stepped out from amid the shrubbery.

They came to a sudden pause upon seeing Barney, Pomp and Matt Mainbrace standing in the road.

"Oh," said Frank reassuringly, "you need not be alarmed, Mr. Howard, for that negro and Irishman are my friends, and the crowd is gone."

"You are so kind," replied Harry Howard emotionally; "I cannot thank you enough. The negro and Irishman are whispering, I see, and pointing at the old sailor. I am glad they are not some of my enemies; I am fearfully nervous. But for your meeting me just now, and so kindly offering to shelter me, I do not know what I should do. I am very grateful to you."

"Well," said Frank, "what was the matter, anyway? You are not a bad fellow, if I am a judge of human nature."

"I fell in love with May Blossom, a beautiful orphan girl who lived in New York, and Ralph Despard, a balloonist, also became very much enamored of her. She gave me her preference. Despard challenged me to fight a duel. We met in a barn, for he insulted me. I shot him. Whether he killed him or not I do not know. Discovered, fled. A detective pursued me to this town all the way from New York."

"So that is the way the case stands, eh?"

"That and nothing more. Will you cast me out now?"

"No. You said Despard was a villain—tried to assassinate you; so you did right to fight him. I will assist you all I can."

"God bless you, Mr. Reade," said Harry Howard, fervently pressing the young inventor's hand. "I hope to repay you some day."

"Bosh! Ah! look! see that Irishman and negro; they are regular imps of mischief! Evidently they mean to play some practical joke on that old sailor whom your enemies just mistook for you. Just keep quiet, and we will see what they are going to do."

Harry Howard nodded and crouched back in the shrubbery with Frank, where they could see and hear all without being discovered.

Barney and Pomp had evidently come to a conclusion of their plan, for they walked over to Matt Mainbrace, and Barney tapped him on the arm.

"Arrah, sor!" said the Irishman, with a grin. "an' isn't it Misther Reade, Jr., yer after wantin' may I be so bowled as to inquire?"

"Oh!" said the sailor, making a sudden clutched at the bosom of his shirt with a frightened air, then turning and seeing who it was that alarmed him, his fear left him, and he smiled and said:

"By gol! you skart me then. Yes—yes. I do."

want to run afoul o' Mr. Reade, Jr., in the wust way, my hearty. An' can I see him?"

"Faix an' yer a luckin' at him now," said Barney, hardly able to conceal his mirth as the old man hastened his glance on Pomp.

"What! Blow me, but there mus' be some mistake, my lad. This 'ere colored man can't be him. Dash it, I thought—"

"Worra, an' is it Mr. Reade's histry yer not ather knowin'?"

"Waal, I've hearn tell a mighty good sight about him."

"Yer knows as he's traveled in many furrin parts?"

"So I have heard."

"Thin don't be ather mistakin' him for ther jokes av a nagur. Shure an' he's only sun-burn'd. D'yer want to insult him, sor, be a-sayin' he's only a common, ordinary nagur?"

Pomp began to get mad at this, and covertly shook his fist at Barney behind the old sailor's back, wherater Barney grinned broader.

Matt Mainbrace hastily began to make amends for an error he imagined he had made, by bowing profoundly to Pomp, and he said in eager tones of the most humble apology:

"By gol, I ax parding, Mr. Reade. Folks will make mistakes, jedgin' by appearances, you know. I've traveled a sight myself, havin' been in nigh every part on this blessed globe in my day; but, gol darn me if ever I got sich a tannin' as you did. I s'pose it's accordin' ter ther elerwated latitudes in which you travels?"

"Spees it am, honey," said Pomp, who was secretly tickled to be mistaken for the wonderful young inventor. "But wha' yo' want?"

"I calkerlate I kin 'splain matters in mighty few words, cap'en," earnestly said the gulled old sailor. "Every one thinks as Matt Mainbrace is a madman, but he ain't. Wot he has got is dead certain proof o' wot he ses, an' he's willin' ter put ther biggest fortune ther world ever seen inter ther hands o' Frank Reade, Jr., if so be as Frank Reade, Jr., 'll help ter git it."

"Dis yar pug-nosed, freckle-faced Irish baboon done tole me yo' been ter see me 'bout dat mattah befoah," said Pomp, pointing at Barney with his thumb, "an' I done tole yo', chile, I se a-gwine fo' ter kiek dat red-headed galoot ob a sarbant out ob my employ if he doan' be moah 'tentive to my business affairs."

Barney winced and almost kicked himself at this dig, but he was powerless just then to refute the grinning Pomp's calumnies.

The old sailor looked a little surprised at Pomp's talk, for he felt sure he was addressing a negro, yet so important was his business with Frank Reade, Jr., he did not want to risk any chances saying anything.

"If so be as yo'll sit down by ther roadside here w' me," said the old sailor, "I'll tell yer jist what it was as brung me all the way from New York ter see yer, Mr. Reade, an' I calkerlate as yo'll be a werry 'sprised man when I tells yer all's I've got ter say."

Pomp winked at Barney, and together they sat down on either side of Mainbrace, for his earnestness impressed them and aroused their curiosity.

Even the hidden Frank and Harry Howard were wrought up to a pitch of inquisitiveness and remained perfectly quiet, listening to what was transpiring.

"Waal," said the old sailor, as he drew a piece of old oil-silk from his pocket, "I'll be as brief as I kin, tellin' yer how I came by this ere secret, an' when I'm done yer kin jedger ther hull matter fer yerself. It was some twenty-five years ago I was shipwrecked on ther north-eastern seaboard of Australia, an' was captured by ther natives. They brung me inter ther interior, an' while there I saved ther life o' one o' ther ole men o' a neighborin' tribe, which was captured along o' me. We escaped together, but on our journey ter ther seacoast he was took with a fever which I seen would kill him. Afore he died, he tole me that ther was a golden city hidden in a mountain, plam in ther middle of Australia, which I knowed mus' be Central Mount Stuart. He had larned ther secret from his father, an' gave me directions how ter git thar. Handin' me this werry roll of oil-silk, he tole me o' many dangers I'd hev ter go through ter reach ther buried city, an' then he died."

"Heaven rist his soul," said Barney, with a skeptical wink at Pomp.

"I journeyed ter ther mountain," continued the old sailor, in earnest tones, "an' arter many trials, troubles an' much labor, I penetrated that ere golden city. It was wonderful. Gold, gold, gold everywhere, an' it was an enormous treasure. But I could not carry but little away, and that I had ter sell, ter git back home ag'in. It was jist as hard ter git away from thar, over a fiery chasm, through a den o' wild beasts, an' two bands o' giants an' dwarfs as it was ter git thar, but I done it."

"When I got back ter this ere country I tried ter

interest different rich people ter help me ter get that wonderful treasure, but all laughed at me an' everybody said I was crazy. Yet here's ther ole manuscripts that ole bushman gave me rolled in this oil silk. A perferer translated it fer me. It's writ in ther Maylay language. Look at it an' jedger yerself. I knowed you had flyin' machines an' sich like, which'd be handy ter git it, an' I thought as I'd come ter yer an' tell yer all about it. If yer failed ter believe ole Matt Mainbrace, then he wasn't agoin' ter do no more but perpare his ole hulk fer Davy Jones' locker."

He handed a scroll of parchment to Pomp, which he unrolled from the oil silk, and the negro beheld these Malay words, legible in some places, and badly faded, blotted, and lost in others:

"Goa * radja * doua saponlou laklali * penanten dilan coulou doua boulan sama saso tingul gounon diadalm * yarton di * tana. Datan kita dapat pilingam * mass tanan-mass *** coubouran di * sato raja. Kita ako idop * taun diadalm * bessar gounon mao. Poug-nalorako bagniaoran * kali. Sama * treva-mera balou kita naik di atas tiga ari. Sama * Oran Capala balou, lacass massocdi dalm * pintou deri rouma dibaroua * gounon. * Interredouia Kala Kredgiapenou * tampat — mass pougia-toulou oran mate *****"

"BUDDAI."

The transcription was worded thus in English under it.

"I, the king, with twenty men and our wives, walked westward, two moons, to one high mountain, in the heart of the land. Arrived, we found temples and golden treasure there, and the tomb of the first kings. There we have lived many years in the great mountain, willingly. My beloved brothers, who went to the south and north, have peopled the rivers. At the blood-red rock we climbed above three days, and at the Man's Head Rock afterward, we entered the gate to the houses below the mountain. The world's treasures filled the place—gold—and the skeletons of men ***."

"BUDDAI."

It was a singular manuscript, and coupled with Matt Mainbrace's story, it savored of such probability, that Frank Reade, Jr., was struck, for he could read the words on the parchment from where he stood.

Indeed, so impressed was he, that he emerged from the midst of the trees, followed by Harry Howard, and approaching the trio, he said:

"See here, boys, this joke has gone far enough!"

The three were startled, and simultaneously sprang to their feet.

"I have heard the story, and read this paper," continued Frank, "and I am inclined to give credence to the matter. You look a little surprised, Matt Mainbrace. But I will undeceive you. I am Frank Reade, Jr., the one whom you are seeking. These two men are my friends and they have been fooling you. But come up to my house, and I will have a long talk with you. If there is any truth in your story, I not only will aid you to find this mountain of gold, but shall put at your disposal my latest invention, by the aid of which we can easily reach it. Pomp—go on to the post office!"

The crestfallen darky moved away with the letters and the astounded Matt Mainbrace, Barney, and Harry Howard followed the young inventor back to his house.

They had hardly gone in, however, when a middle-sized man with a black beard, and piercing black eyes came from behind a rock near where they had been standing, in back of which he had been crouching, and from whence he had overheard all that passed.

He was a stylish man, but there was a vindictive gleam in his eyes and a sardonic look upon his face as he shook his fist at them and hissed:

"So this is where Howard has found shelter? Curse him! I've found him out. But he shall never leave here alive. And it will be strange if I do not have my share of that mountain treasure. Ralph Despard, you are in luck!"

CHAPTER II

THE GREYHOUND OF THE AIR.

WHEN Frank and the three others entered the house a guest was found there who had called to see the young inventor.

He was none else than Frank's old friend, Dr. Vaneyke, the scientist and explorer, and, after the first greetings were over, Matt Mainbrace was asked to repeat his story more in detail, while the professor examined the ancient manuscripts with the closest attention.

The professor was an attentive listener to the narrative, and a serious look was upon his face, when Frank turned to him with:

"Well, doctor, what is your opinion of this matter?"

"It is my firm conviction," replied the man of science, "that this sailor is neither a maniac nor a fool. His story has a convincing, truthful ring in it that impresses me with a sense of credulity; and as for this old manuscript, that it is genuine there cannot be the faintest shadow of a doubt. I am a

linguist, and recognize it as bona fide Malay writing of an ancient style. Now couple what the sailor said with the eager substance of this parchment's story, and connect it with the early history of Australia and you will have a wonderful relation of events. It is tolerably certain that the progenitors of the first Australians drifted in canoes from the island of Timor to the northwest coast on Cambridge Gulf, or Arnhem Land, and advanced in three separate directions over the continent. By one route they went south, near the Great Bight, the other division going along the west coast to Swan River, while the third and most important body went eastward. They are traced, in the course of ages, across the Gulf of Carpentaria, then split and subdivided amid the rivers and highlands of Queensland. Some of the tribes crossed the Upper Darling, occupying New South Wales, overspread the Riverina and peopled the south east."

"But what has all this to do with the manuscripts?" asked Frank.

"A good deal. Mark the course of the middle tribe. They had the king with them. Their god, or deity of to-day, is called Buddai—a gigantic old man lying asleep for ages, with his head resting upon his arm, which is deep in the sand, and he is expected to awake some day and eat up the whole land. Now the middle tribe had its radja, and he may have been the Australian's Buddai. His course would bring part of his tribe to Central Mount Stuart—the loftiest peak on the whole continent. Buddai is signed to the manuscripts. Could it not have been he who found or founded the hidden city in the mountain? Giants, this man says, were in the mountains. Now, while most of the natives are average-sized men, those of North Queensland are very tall and muscular. This manuscript tells of the first explorers just as history has it, and indicates that the sultan of the middle division wrote it. So you see there is foundation in literal fact to believe in it."

Matt Mainbrace chuckled to see this argument clinch all doubts in Frank's mind, for he saw a chance now for his pet schemes to succeed.

"Moreover," continued the professor emphatically, "that there is plausibility in there being a mountain of gold, is amply evinced by the opening up of wonderful gold fields all over the eastern hilly region of the continent. The scientific theory is that most of the central portion of the continent was once the bed of an inland sea, it is such a hollow basin, and the vegetation is so stunted and peculiar in character. The washing of the tides would, in due time, reveal any great treasures the bosom of the earth covered from the sight of man. For my part, were this old man to start an expedition to-morrow, I would be one of the first to join him, if I were invited to do so."

"Then, by jingo!" said Frank, jumping up, "you shall have a chance, professor, for I am going in search of the mountain of gold with him, and shall start within a week in my new air-ship, the Greyhound. I have it completed and all ready for a trial, as you know, and only was awaiting an opportunity like this to make use of it. Now who will go?"

There was not a dissenting voice, for even Harry Howard, pursued as he was like a wild beast for a murder he had never committed, was anxious to escape from the country.

The old sailor was delighted beyond measure, and at the professor's suggestion he drew a crude map of the mountain with explanatory notes of how to reach the golden city.

Frank took this map and the old manuscript in his own hands and tied them together with a string, remarking jubilantly:

"Land, ocean, mountains, valleys, rivers and plains, will be as nothing to us now. I have got a vessel that far surpasses anything I have ever yet turned out. You have most all seen it in its first stage, but if you will follow me I will show you the details now. Then, Matt Mainbrace, if you are afraid of an aerial voyage in it you can remain behind."

"I trust," said the professor, seriously, "that it will fare better than your previous invention did—eh, Barney?"

"Begorra," said the Irishman, following the rest out to the yard of the work-shop on their tour of inspection, "there's only wan regret I hev agin ther lasht wan, an' that wor ther fact that ther wasn't a whisky-factory in wan corner av the aould machine."

A strange sight met the view of the spectators in the yard.

It was the hull of a light draught ship with a sharp ram at the bow, and a gracefully-curving, long counter-stern.

It was built of the finest steel, rolled down to the thickness of paper, but very elastic and as tough as an inch plate.

Upon the stern, the rudder, made of this thin steel, was fastened.

There was a steel rod projecting from the end c

the keel at the stern, to which a propeller was fastened after the manner of the screw of a steamer, excepting that it was larger, the long counter of the stern giving it free play without touching the ground.

On either side of the hull, a trifle aft, projecting backwards, were two more enormous light steel propellers, while from the deck there arose six uprights, three on either side of the deck, at the tops of which a large, powerful suspensory helice was fastened, to raise the air-ship to any desired altitude by the aid of electric condensers and piles stowed away in the battery room in the hold.

There was a wheel house on the forward deck, circular in form, inclosed by toughened glass, in which was situated a lever board, by which the vessel was controlled; a deck house amidships containing bunks and storage room, and a large cabin aft.

Besides this, a search light capable of reflecting two miles ahead was stationed on a pivot in the bow, while against the hull at the catheads was an enormous wing of steel on either side, so portably constructed as to fold up out of the way when in disuse.

The entire boat was built of thin steel, and was painted gray all over.

A shade of disappointment crossed Dr. Vaneyke's face as he glanced over the two hundred feet of length and twenty-five feet of beam of the immense air-ship resting upon eight automatic flanges, that sprung out when the Greyhound was settling earthward.

"Enormous, light, and beautiful in outline and workmanship," said he; "but, Frank, you have employed a material too heavy for any aerostat. Why, it is too entirely great in specific gravity. Your helices are too few."

"The latest experiments I made with my model of the same material have proven satisfactory, professor, and I now have an air-ship capable of withstanding bullets and banging to a wonderful degree without a chance of breakage under ordinary circumstances. I have raised it, and am satisfied that it is all I expected."

The professor did not argue the point, despite his doubts, for he knew from past experience that Frank Reade, Jr. seldom ever made a mistake in anything he ever undertook to accomplish.

"I am satisfied, Frank," said he gravely.

"Then send over your traps as soon as you please, gentlemen," said Frank, smilingly; "make our quarters on board the Greyhound of the Air, and I warrant you that the fare there will prove in excess of anything else you ever had in your lives before. I have got a stock of provisions on board to last a month, and more instruments and essentials than are needed. And I promise you that this trip to the scorching climate of Australia will prove to be the greatest I have ever yet undertaken. I will send my folks word of it at once."

They went up a ladder, and examining the interior workings of the air-ship, they found her to be as perfect as human art and skill could make her in every point and detail.

The different workings of the vessel will be explained in due course.

When their curiosity was sated they returned to the house, where the professor left them, and Barney and Pomp busied themselves getting everything in readiness for instant departure cloudward.

Frank assigned Harry Howard and Matt Mainbrace to apartments, and they all retired for the night, the young inventor taking the old sailor's papers with him to his bedroom.

By the following night everything was in readiness for departure, and Frank and Mainbrace sat in the parlor at a table near the window, beside which was the only gas fixture that lighted the room.

They were talking over their plans and alternately glancing out in the dark yard beyond at the great air-ship in which the doctor, Barney, Pomp and Harry Howard were housed. The night was excessively gloomy.

Frank had the valuable papers on the table before him, having just read them through, when two hands darted in through the open window. One turned out the light and the other snatched away the papers.

Quick as thought the boy sprang through the window, but the thief was gone.

Luckily for Frank, his wonderful memory retained every word of the translation of the parchment letter, as he had just read it, and he immediately returned to the house and wrote a fac-simile of it, and secured a new drawing of the old sailor's plan from Mainbrace.

They were to depart as soon as Frank heard from his father, and wondering who the thief of the papers was, they vainly waited another day. On the following night, equally as dark as the preceding, Frank and Harry Howard left the house to sleep on board the air-ship with the others

when the young inventor caught sight of a man hiding behind the horse stable.

The two crept forward quietly, thinking he was the manuscript thief, when they saw that he was the detective who had been pursuing Howard.

He was accompanied by the same gang of ruffians who attacked the old sailor.

"There's no use fooling, boys," the detective was saying so that they could overhear him. "I'll own up. Ralph Despard is alive. He was only wounded. He wants revenge upon Harry Howard now. He was here last night, and stole a valuable paper from Reade. He wants this air trip stopped, and paid handsomely for it. He wants to make the journey himself. There's a mint in it for him. We must smash this air-ship, or retard them somehow to give Despard the start."

"Treachery!" gasped Frank, in startled amazement.

"My rival is the thief who robbed you!" groaned Howard.

He spoke unguardedly, and the detective and his hired gang heard him.

With a rush they started out from behind the stable after the two young men, armed with the most dangerous kind of weapons.

"We are betrayed!" shouted the desperate detective. "Down them! If we let them escape us we may all go to jail! Quick—come!"

The rascals made a rush, and Frank was about to pull out his pistol and face them when Howard hastily cried:

"Come on! They are a dozen to one! It is madness to fight! While we engage some others may destroy the Greyhound!"

There was logic in this, and they both ran for the flying machine some distance away, while the detective shouted:

"Stand, or we'll shoot at you!"

They paid no heed to this threat, but continued on, and a volley was discharged at their dim, flying forms, but they missed their mark.

In a moment they were upon the Greyhound, rushed inside, and Frank dashed into the wheelhouse, pulled a lever, there came a loud buzz, and just as the ruffians drew near the Greyhound darted up into the air.

CHAPTER III.

A MID-AIR STRUGGLE.

It was a much quicker start than the aeronauts intended to make, but the harmless hail of bullets that rattled against the bottom of the hull told Frank that he had gone none too soon.

There were servants in the house who would attend to everything, and when the professor suggested that they start off on their journey at once, Frank was nothing loth, and the air-ship was turned westward.

The huge helices did their functions admirably, and raised the air-ship to the height of fifteen thousand feet, at which distance Frank decreased the revolutions of the wheels and started the propellers on either side and at the stern, sending the Greyhound ahead at a terrific rate.

"I made 120 miles in my last air-ship," said he to the scientist, "as you may remember, but I will show you 200 with this one, less oscillation, and a power to speed through the waves of the sea at a rate of forty knots an hour. Moreover, we could go through a flame of fire without feeling much inconvenience in this boat, if the asbestos lining proves good. And it is just such a ship as this we will need if ever we reach Australia!"

The Greyhound worked like magic, passing upward through a mass of clouds measuring over one thousand feet in thickness.

Barney had gone to the battery-room as first engineer, Pomp as usual was assigned to the governorship of the culinary department, and while Dr. Vaneyke was to act as assistant steersman, Harry Howard was posted to assist Barney, with Matt Mainbrace acting as a general assistant to all hands.

Another man was sadly needed though, to take turns with the old sailor as look-out, and to attend to other matters.

In view of this fact Frank resolved to make one stop ere reaching the Pacific coast and secure another individual.

There was a trellis-work bulwark around the deck, and when the ship was traveling ahead, all but Frank went out of the wheel-house.

Barney had so gauged the machinery that it only required occasional lubrication, and but little attention after it was started, as the entire mechanism was controlled by the lever-board in the wheel-house.

The temperature outside was almost at zero, while the dew-point was at 26 degrees on the hygrometer; breathing in the rarified atmosphere became difficult at first, and the cold chilled them all through.

Besides this, their vision became impaired, so that for a time they could not see the column of

mercury in the bulb, nor the hands of the barometer.

These feelings were accompanied by a numbness—a giddy, nauseous feeling and a slight loss of muscular power in the limbs.

A perfect stillness reigned, only broken now and then by the distant clang of a bell far below, or any unusually loud noise, while above them the moon and stars gleamed with singular vividness in the dense darkness.

A thick hoar-frost was upon the entire air-ship, and the contact of a hand with any of the brass or steel work resulted in a burning.

The strange feelings that overwhelmed the aerial voyagers soon wore off, for the ship had been ascending at the rate of nearly 2,000 feet a minute, descended a short distance at double that speed, and then went ahead at the medium rate of sixty miles an hour.

Below them the moonlight was streaming upon a magnificent sea of cloud, its surface varied with endless hills, hillocks, mountain chains and numberless snow-white masses arising up sharply from its bed.

They sped on, all trace of the earth shut out from their sight, and presently came to a very dark mass of cloud on their own level with fringed edges, surcharged with rain which they were shedding.

"Well, Howard," said the professor, "how do you feel?"

"Queer—mighty queer," the young man replied. "There's a buzzing in my ears, which keeps increasing, and a pain all over me, like one feels when plunging the head in cold water. My chest seems dilated, fails in elasticity, my pulse is quickened, my lips swelled, the veins come out strongly on my hands, blood runs to my head and eyes, and—well, I'm sea-sick, as it were."

"The usual symptoms of an aerial voyage," laughed the professor.

An electrometer and conductors had been set, but the glass, the brimstone, and the Spanish wax were not electrified to show any signs under friction, and a voltaic pile of silver and zinc, consisting of sixty couples, gave one degree, while a galvanic flame appeared more active in this high altitude than at earth.

"Is there any danger of asphyxia up here?" asked Howard, nervously.

"Not at this elevation. You see, hydrogen gas, at a certain height, will find itself in equilibrium in the air of the atmosphere, but it must be at the extremity of the atmosphere itself. As the gas has an elasticity greater than that of the air, it keeps dilating as it mounts in higher regions. Its specific weight diminishes as the atmospheric air decreases. It won't stop mounting until it rises above the atmosphere itself. This only relates to confining it in a bulb; if it mixes with the atmospheric air, it diffuses and loses power. This is the principle upon which ballooning is based. Oxygen is the reverse."

"But this rarity—this stifling feeling—this gasping—"

"Remember, the higher we mount the less the atmospheric pressure you sustain to gravitate you earthward. A man holds up a weight on earth of fifteen pounds to the square inch upon the surface of his body of this atmospheric pressure. An average man's body exposes an average surface of about six thousand inches, which, multiplied by fifteen pounds for each inch, shows us that when on earth we each sustain about ninety thousand pounds of atmospheric pressure. Incredible, isn't it? Of course, the higher we mount the less this pressure, and no doubt beyond the confines of our earthly atmospheric belt anything would float in space as meteors do. They do not shoot until they get within the center of gravity, or in other words, the belt of air we breathe. Then they are dragged to the earth with such terrific force that friction with the air's resistance ignites them. The nearer they approach the ground, the faster they fall."

Just then a crash below apprised the doctor that the ship was passing over a thunder cloud, and an instant later the electricity attracting the steel vessel suddenly gave it a wrench that knocked all hands over, and the Greyhound suddenly dove down. A thrill of horror passed over all hands.

They imagined that they were lost, for the air-ship, acting as a needle would to the lodestone of a horse-shoe magnet, had been attracted down to the electrified strata of atmosphere with terrific force.

For an instant the machinery was stopped, the helices failed to gyrate, the propellers ceased whirling upon their axes, and the Greyhound was falling earthward like a thunderbolt.

Down it plunged into the midst of the jet-black, dense cloud bank, amid which the searing lightning was whizzing, and in a moment it was enveloped in appalling gloom and horror.

It almost seemed like suddenly falling into the infernal regions, for there came crash upon crash of thunder upon all sides as the electrical currents

met; a fiery haze suddenly enveloped the entire ship, and it vibrated with the violent concussions as if about to be rent to atoms.

The deafening intonations and the glaring tongues of blazing lightning were appalling beyond correct description; but Frank, all alone in the wheel-house, did not for an instant lose control of himself.

The moment he felt the attraction of the heavenly battery beneath he grasped a lever and pulled it out, when with a whirl the folding wings on either side of the hull shot out and balanced the ship after the manner of two enormous parachutes. The violence of the fall was immediately diminished, and the ship regained its equilibrium and settled off in its descent at an angle.

The stoppage of the machinery failed to allow the wings to move, but they acted in the form of brakes against the air by their vast area of displacement.

Through the electrified cloud banks shot the Greyhound, and in less than a minute she was below the storm in the falling rain, the phosphorescent glow-flame vanished, and the machinery started again as if nothing happened.

Frank breathed a sigh of intense relief, and, glancing out the windows of the pilot-house, he saw the helices and propellers revolving again.

But for his cool courage all hands must have perished.

He saw his passengers scramble unharmed to their feet, and had hardly seen them dart toward the cabin-door aft, when he was suddenly startled by hearing a fearful shriek in the tones of a female directly beneath the air-ship.

Just then Barney came in, and leaving the wheel in his hands, he sprang through the front window to the deck, rushed up to the search-light in the bow, and touching an electric press-button, he ignited the carbons.

An immense sheen of light shot out from the octagonal reflector, and darted away in a piercing stream nearly two miles ahead in the gloom.

All around flashed the light, as the rest rushed up to him, the intense glow wavering here and there, and cutting the darkness like a knife.

Shriek upon shriek in that same thrilling, feminine tone reached their eyes appealing for mercy and imploring God's protection.

Suddenly the light came to a pause; Frank had found a strange object.

An immense dark body floating in space glided quietly within the stream of vivid light, in the pelting rain, the lightning flashing from the black clouds above, lending the weird scene a ghastly aspect.

The dark floating body dissolved into an immense balloon within the ray of the search-light, and in the basket beneath, a man and woman were as plainly revealed as if the noonday sun shone upon them.

An awful tragedy was being enacted within the swaying, whirling, and oscillating basket-car of the balloon, from the bottom of which a long drag-rope hung down, with a grapnel anchor at the end.

The man, a black-bearded fellow in stylish clothes, had the woman clutched by the throat with one hand, while with the other he brandished a flashing dagger over her bosom, as if to deal her a fatal stab!

Every sound in the basket ascended to those upon the deck of the Greyhound, and a hoarse cry of horror pealed from Harry Howard's pale lips.

"Great heaven!" he groaned, his eyes bulging and his form quivering as he pointed a trembling finger at those in the balloon. "There is May Blossom, my affianced wife, in that basket with Ralph Despard, my rival, and the monster is endeavoring to murder her!"

"But I shall stop him!" cried Frank, and in a twinkling he had a revolver pointed at the man who had caused Harry all his trouble, and who had stolen Matt Mainbrace's valuable documents.

Bang! went the weapon an instant later, and with a cry of pain Despard relaxed his hold upon his victim, and reeled back.

"Saved! Saved!" shrieked the girl frantically, as she held out her arms toward the Greyhound.

"Could Heaven have sent me this deliverance?"

"No!" yelled Despard, recovering himself, his black eyes glaring with a tigerish light. "This is a human agency. My plan to thwart them is baffled. I abducted and carried you away with me in vain. They would frustrate me. Your lover, I know, is on that air-ship. But I am determined to have you. If it cannot be alive, then you shall be mine dead. I have sworn it. That is why I tried to kill you! And by heavens, I shall keep my vow!"

He sprang at her with the ferocity of a wild beast, his knife clenched between his teeth, grasped her up in his arms, and clambered up on the edge of the basket, she meantime shrieking wildly for mercy.

He shook his fist at the air-ship, and grasping

the ring of a huge parachute, he tore it loose, and sprang from the car with her.

Agroan from Howard's very heart was wrung up as he saw them fall down through space, and the girl flung out her hands.

They came in contact with the balloon drag-rope, and she clutched it.

The parachute had opened, but their descent was suddenly checked.

A snarl of fury escaped Despard, and he wound a leg around the rope, held on the parachute with one hand, and taking the knife from between his teeth with his disengaged hand, he aimed another blow at her with it.

Again Frank's pistol rang out, and the knife struck by a bullet, was knocked from Despard's hand ere it reached the girl.

Then he uttered a cry, grasped the parachute with both hands, and fell.

Down he shot, and in a minute he was engulfed in the darkness.

The girl, half fainting, was left hanging on the rope of the balloon, which darted upward when relieved of Despard's weight.

She could not hang on long, though, for her senses were fast leaving her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNTAIN IN THE HAZE.

THE moment Ralph Despard fell earthward through the dark, rainy night clinging to the parachute, Frank Reade, Jr., glanced down over the railing of the Greyhound and saw May Blossom hanging on to the balloon drag-rope.

It was manifest to the young inventor that the girl's senses were upon the eve of departing, and he knew that if he failed to act promptly in an effort to save her life she would let go the rope and fall down into the yawning gulf below, meeting death ere reaching the earth!

The situation was desperate.

There was a rope lying coiled up in a box in the bow below the search light, the flame from which was cutting down upon the deserted balloon.

Frank hastily opened the box and seized the rope, one end of which was firmly secured to a ring-bolt within the box.

Relieved of Despard's weight, the balloon had shot up a certain distance, and, meeting its own equilibrium, it stopped its ascent and began to float off in a strong current of air in nearly the same direction the Greyhound was then pursuing.

Barney steered the air-ship after it in a twinkling, and the Greyhound was fast overtaking it, but it hung fully one hundred feet below where Frank stood, and he calculated the distance, and muttered:

"To get the girl from that rope we must descend at least one hundred and fifty feet, for she could not catch hold of this rope, as it would hang nearly twenty feet away out of her reach, and the ballast of the balloon won't let it mount any higher."

Then he turned to the old scientist, and added: "Dr. Vaneyke, keep the search-light reflected full upon her! I will relieve Barney at the wheel. Ah—Howard—come here! Now is your chance to show your grit. If you love the girl here is a chance for you to risk your life to save hers."

"What do you mean? What shall I do?"

"Let me tie this rope around you, and we will lower you down to the girl. You can lift her off the drag rope before she falls if you lose no time."

"I will do it!" said Howard, casting a shuddering glance down at the depths below. "I'd risk anything for her. Hurry and tie me."

Frank had made a slip noose in the end of the rope while he was talking, and having adjusted it about the young man, he called Matt Mainbrace, Pomp and Barney to lower Howard down, while he dashed into the wheel-house to manage the boat.

Down went Howard over the side an instant later, with Matt, Barney and Pomp holding the rope and paying it out, while Dr. Vaneyke managed the glaring search-light so they could see what they were doing.

Frank pulled the lever on the keyboard in front of him, and he observed that the air-ship was directly above the balloon, and instantly the side and stern propellers slackened the rapidity of their revolutions, until the Greyhound traveled at the same rate of speed as the balloon.

Then he grasped another lever to cause the helices to revolve slower, so that the air-ship might descend.

He waited a moment, and then a thrill of horror passed over him, for he observed that the electric machinery failed to respond.

The Greyhound darted ahead, but did not fall an inch.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank, "what does this mean? Can the motive power have been injured by the electric storm we passed through? This is frightful! We cannot get down to aid the girl now, for the bulge of the balloon holds the rope

Howard is on away from the drag rope attached beneath the car."

At this moment he heard Howard's voice shouting:

"Lower the ship, Reade! Harry, for pity's sake!"

"Oh!" gasped Frank, in dismay, "I am utterly helpless. Here, Barney, take the wheel, while I run down in the battery-room, and see what the matter is. We can't go down an inch."

The frightened Irishman grasped the spokes, and Frank dashed out on deck just as Pomp uttered a yell of intense horror.

"What's the matter, Pomp?" asked the young inventor, suddenly pausing.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Massa Frank, look down dar!" replied the negro, pointing with one hand down the dark abyss, through which the pale-faced doctor was darting the rays of the search-light.

A thrilling scene met Frank's view.

Harry Howard, unable to reach the girl, on a line with whose body he then hung suspended by the rope, was violently swinging his body, and swaying the rope like the pendulum of a clock.

Every time he lurched forward, his hands darted out to grasp the girl, but the upper part of the rope midway between himself and the air-ship striking against the bulge of the balloon, would knock the girl out of his reach by moving the balloon.

But he increased his exertions, and swung back and forth with redoubled vigor a dozen times, and each time missed her.

Everything had transpired in but few moments, but it seemed an age to the anxious, nervous, on-lookers, Howard, and the girl.

Back and forth with a rush went the body of the intrepid young man, when suddenly, at one lucky swoop he caught the girl.

She was half stupefied with fright, and tenaciously clung to the drag-rope, holding the rope Harry was fastened to out at an abrupt angle.

"Let go!" exclaimed Howard. "I've got you!"

There was but little need of this admonition, though, for the girl's senses left her, the tiny hands relaxed, and a shiver of horror passed over those upon the Greyhound as they saw the rope go flying back under and past the hull of the rocking air-ship.

The balloon darted upward, when relieved of May Blossom's weight, and young Howard and the girl were left hanging in space, swaying to and fro with a sickening movement.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank. "He is a trump. Such nerve!"

"Haul away, up there!" shouted Howard from below.

The two men who had hold of the rope were strong, but they had the utmost difficulty to obey this injunction, for there was a dead weight at the other end of the rope, and over one hundred and fifty feet of length augmented the strain enormously.

They pulled and tugged, and Dr. Vaneyke abandoned the light, and went to their assistance with Frank.

By uniting their combined force, they finally managed to haul Howard and the girl up to the deck.

The noose had so tightened about Howard's lungs that he could hardly breathe, and his eyes were starting from their sockets, his face was almost purple, his lips were swollen, and his clothes were sadly torn and disarranged.

But he recovered partially when relieved of the pressure of the rope.

"Safe! Safe!" he gasped, as he fell upon his knees.

"Pomp! Here—take this whisky flask!" shouted Frank.

The negro got it and Howard imbibed a draught, after which Dr. Vaneyke stimulated the unconscious girl with a potion which he was obliged to force down her throat.

May Blossom soon afterward revived.

Then she sat up, and glanced vacantly around.

The balloon vanished in the clouds overhead.

Barney had control of the wheel, and sent the Greyhound ahead faster, and within a few minutes they were far away from the scene of adventure.

It had been a narrow escape, and they all felt a tremendous sense of relief when they saw the girl safe. The rainstorm, with its dangerous electrified clouds, was left far astern, and the vessel was flying through the air with a brilliant moon and silvery stars overhead once more.

The moment the girl revived, found herself safe on the deck of the Greyhound, and saw by the effulgent glow of the myriad electric lights on all sides that she was beside her lover, and was flying through the air, she acted like a dreaming person.

Rubbing her clear blue eyes, while a look of intense amazement swept across her beautiful white face, she glanced mutely from one of the men to

the other, and then at her singular surroundings.

"Can-it-be-possible," she faltered, "that this-is—Am I really dead?"

"May I?" emotionally cried Howard, holding out his hands to her.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet, her face changing. "This is no dream! I am not dead! Oh, glad reality! Harry! Harry!"

She began to cry and sob, and flung herself into her lover's arms.

But she soon recovered her composure, and with blushing cheeks, as she recollected that the others were looking at her, she disengaged herself from Howard's arms, and said, with a nervous laugh:

"I am forgetting myself. This place is so strange, though—"

"You are upon the Greyhound of the Air—a flying ship," said Howard, explanatorily, "one of the most remarkable inventions in the world."

"Ah! That explains it—and, you being here? Ah! I understand all."

"I am making a journey to Australia on it with the inventor, a gentleman who has rendered me the most invaluable assistance. Allow me to introduce you to all hands."

He thereupon made the Greyhound's crew acquainted with her, and she proved to be a charming creature, vivacious and fascinating, well bred, and of a jolly disposition.

"I suppose," said she, "that you all are wondering how I came to be in that balloon with Ralph Despard?"

"We are very curious," said Frank, "but if you will kindly defer the explanation a few moments, we will go down in the battery-room and examine the machinery, to learn the cause of the helices' refusal to slacken speed so we could descend."

"Certainly," replied the girl.

"If the machinery is out of order," explained Frank, "and I do not attend to it at once, we run the risk of the entire thing giving away, when we may all be suddenly launched into eternity."

There was yet a fearful danger menacing them, and it made them all feel decidedly uncomfortable.

They followed Frank through a door in the middle deck house and down a flight of stairs into a large, square room in the hold, brilliantly illuminated by electric lights.

The four walls were covered with shelves, upon which stood the electricity accumulator jars in rows, from the hermetically sealed covers of each of which a rubber-covered wire ran up to a dead-hole in the wall, where they disappeared in the form of a thick cable.

From the cable they radiated all over the vessel, distributing their power wherever it was needed, while another series of insulated wires ran up to the key-board in the pilot house.

In the center of the room a small, exceedingly light dynamo machine was in operation, and two light shafts fastened to the ceiling were connected by cog-wheels with the helix shafts, while three other shafts in boxes that ran along the floor were coupled with the driving screws on either side and at the stern of the Greyhound.

There was also a wheel at each side connecting with the two enormous wings, that this enormous battery controlled.

"What a queer arrangement!" commented Dr. Vaneyke, glancing around.

"It is simple enough," replied Frank. "Ah! and here is the cause of the trouble. See there—the end of a broken wire has become wedged in between the cogs of the helix shafts, so that when the wheels reverse, the end of the wire stops them from revolving."

He pulled the wire out.

Frank then called up to Barney through a speaking-tube, and told him to lower the air-ship by causing the helices to revolve slower, when he found that the trouble was rectified.

He then carefully examined the rest of the machinery, but found that it was all right, whereupon he smilingly turned to Miss Blossom with:

"And now for your story, miss, since I know we are safe."

The girl nodded, and said:

"Ralph Despard was not killed in the duel he fought with Mr. Howard, but he pretended to be, in order to save his cowardly life. When you fled, Harry, he sent a private detective to loot you out of New York so that he could press his attentions upon me. Left a poor and friendless orphan, I had a sore trial resisting his detested advances. Two nights ago he called at my lodgings, and adroitly drugging me, I was abducted by him."

"Oh, the scoundrel!" exclaimed Howard, furiously.

"Well may you upbraid him. Two days he kept me under the influence of his subtle drugs, meantime, as I learned on his return, he having gone to a place called Readestown, where he stole some valuable papers, by means of which he hoped to enrich himself by finding a mythical mountain of gold."

"Yes, we know all about that matter, and it is true, too, May."

"Indeed!" Well, stupefied again with drugs, I was taken to some western town, to where he had sent his balloon to give a public ascension. I was put in the car, he pocketed the proceeds of a sale of tickets, and disappointing the audience which was to appear next day, he had the balloon inflated during the night and rose skyward with me."

"To take you on his journey to Australia in the balloon?"

"I presume so. In the air I regained my senses, and he coolly told me of my situation. We fought. He saw the air-ship, and the sight maddened him, for he knew you must be in it, as he said so. He boasted he had been paying his emissaries, who delayed it, to give him a start of Mr. Frank Reade, Jr. Seeing that his plans failed, and that his life was in danger if he encountered you, he resolved to spring out with me and run chances of reaching the earth with a parachute. I resisted. He then tried to kill me. I need say no more. You know the rest."

"Heaven decreed that his evil intention should be baffled," said Harry, solemnly, "for fate brought about our singular mid-air meeting."

"It defines the moral that wickedness cannot long prosper."

At this moment the wheels of the wings began to furiously gyrate, and to the amazement of every one, the motor began to work at double speed, and they felt the Greyhound shooting up in the air and ahead at a terrific rate, as the helices and driving-rods began to work faster.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank, in startled surprise.

"What is the matter?"

"Barney must be mad!" exclaimed the doctor.

"It seems as if he has pulled all the levers at once! Great Scott! Run, Frank, see what's up!"

The young inventor dashed up the stairs and out on deck.

The air-ship was enveloped in a thick haze. He glanced around, but could see nothing but the reflecting light, which still shot out ahead of the air-ship.

But following the direction of the light with his gaze, Frank started violently, and then made a dash for the pilot-house.

The others came out on deck, and a shout of horror went up from every throat when they saw that the air-ship was plunging with fearful speed directly toward the jagged rocks of the side of a mountain top, hardly to be seen through the mist. Frank rushed toward the pilot-house.

Barney was nowhere to be seen!

"He has deserted his post!" gasped Frank. "Heavens! And if I do not get in and stop the ship, it will dash against those beetling rocks and smash the Greyhound to pieces!"

Thrilled with horror over the peril menacing them, Frank ran toward the pilot-house in a wild, desperate effort to save the ship and the lives of all on board from utter destruction.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUST STORM.

INTO the wheel-house Frank rushed, his heart fluttering with apprehension, for as the light was radiated but two miles ahead, and the Greyhound was speeding at a mile a minute, he had but little time to do what he wished.

As he sprang in through the doorway he stumbled over the figure of Barney lying on the floor, and flinging out his hand he clutched the lever on the key-board that controlled the driving wheels, pushed it all the way in, and the propellers instantly stopped spinning around.

Another lever was jerked out, as the momentum given the air-ship kept it going straight ahead, and the wheels reversed and brought the Greyhound first to a pause, then sent her backward.

All the while though she kept ascending, dragged up by the helices.

But the catastrophe was averted just in time, for but a short distance separated the air-ship from the rocks when Frank gained control of her and changed her course.

A glance at Barney showed him that the Irishman had simply fallen to the floor overwhelmed with fright, for his teeth were chattering and his face was as pale as death.

"Barney, you fool, get up!" exclaimed Frank.

"What ails you?"

"Howly poker!" groaned O'Shea arising. "It's kilt we all are."

"Explain yourself, you lunatic!" Frank angrily exclaimed.

"Shure an' we're arunnin' down a mountain, an' it's clane through it we'll be afther goin' in wan minnit be ther watch."

"We would have perished had I not just come in and reversed the propellers. What did you turn on all that power for?"

"Have yer schtopped it thin? Thanks be ter St. Pether! Sure I seen rocks ahead, so I did, an' me

mind got benoighted entoirely! I pulled ivery wan av thim levers, for begob, I didn't want ter git kilt wid all the resht av yez, an' thin have yer say that I didn't do narithin' ter thry ter save our lives."

"You should not have lost your wits by getting so panic-stricken," said Frank, who comprehended what ailed his old friend, "for it might have cost us our lives. Always keep a level head, Barney."

"Faix, I tried," said the old fellow, pulling a wry face, "but, be jabbers, me heart flew up in me neck and gave me brain ther dumps, so it did. But it's clear av the mountain we are now, an' ther mist in ther bargain, so yer'd better schtop goin' any hoigher, or it's clane through inter heaven we'll be next."

Frank could not help smiling, and after stopping the movement of the wings, he slackened the speed of the helices, started the air-ship ahead once more and they cleared the mountain.

He then cautioned Barney again, went out on deck, explained to the others what occasioned the trouble, and dividing the men into two watches, he provided May Blossom with handsome quarters.

"Since Harry is going with you," said the girl before she retired, "I will go, too, Mr. Reade, if you have no objections."

"It is a long and dangerous trip from here to our destination," replied Frank, "and the journey is fraught with extreme peril and much hardship. But I can take you, if you wish to go."

"I do, indeed, sir," she replied earnestly.

"On the other hand," continued Frank, "if you wish to alight, as I am going to stop on the Pacific slope to get another man and make a few purchases, I can set you aground and send you back to New York by rail."

"No—I much prefer to go—to share the dangers of my affianced husband, and to render you all the services I can, sir."

"Very well, that ends the matter, Miss Blossom."

With everything regulated on board, Frank retired, and the next day found the Greyhound speeding but 5,000 feet above the land, with the Rocky Mountains in view far ahead.

Below them they could see the sinuous path of a railroad winding through forests, over plains, through villages, and over silvery serpentine rivers that here and there broke the landscape.

It was in the south-east of Idaho, between Fremont's Peak and the Sweet Water Mountains, in the neighborhood of the Great South Pass, arising to an elevation of 7,489 feet above the sea level.

Frank designed that their course should take them south from there through Nevada, down into California, from whence their great trip across the Pacific Ocean would commence.

But their fate was to be decided in a far different manner, as will be shown, for they were more at the mercy of the heavenly elements than they imagined.

The young inventor was standing on deck talking to Dr. Vaneyke, when they met with the mishap that caused them to alter Frank's original project.

"You were saying," said the old scientist, "that the screws were at such a pitch as to allow the motor to revolve at 2,000 revolutions a minute for its maximum speed, that the motor is coupled to the screws, the armature-shaft and screw-shaft being rigidly united, so as to make but one shaft of it. Now I noticed that between the motor bearings and stuffing-box there are spring and double thrust bearings."

"Yes," said Frank nodding. "It is a series motor, and the winding is of such fine wire that it will carry a current of 700 amperes of 200 volts pressure, which is equal to 200 electrical horsepower in ordinary use. This power can be increased by simply making additional connections with extra accumulator jars of vulcanized fiber, which I hold in reserve. I've got 2,000 cells of accumulators. As you saw, they are about 6x7, and 10 inches high, closed by hermetically sealed vulcanite covers, save for a small perforation in a vulcanized knob in the top, which allows any excess of gas to escape. Each cell consists of twenty-five perforated lead plates filled with a paste of oxide of lead and diluted sulphuric acid placed side by side and separated from each other by vulcanized forks. Every alternate plate is connected to a lead strip which projects through the cover and forms one pole of a cell, while each remaining alternate plate is similarly connected to form the other pole."

"Each cell has twenty volts, electro-motive force, and a capacity of 1,500 hours. For instance, if the rate of discharge from one of these cells is 250 amperes, it will deliver this current for sixty hours. A smaller current can be obtained for a longer period, or a larger current for a shorter period of time, provided the product of time expressed in hours, and the current expressed in

amperes does not exceed 1,500 ampere hours, which is the capacity of the cells."

"You have reduced it to a nicety, haven't you, Frank?"

"I had to, doctor. Knowing the capacity of the cells affords me the means of determining the amount of current available, and for indicating the time to recharge the battery. You observed the clock dial in the pilot-house? Well, the hand on it gauges the current going in and out of the cells, so that the pilot can see how much electrical energy is stored away for use in the accumulators. By a contrivance of my own with my dynamo I recharge the cells with electricity I generate myself when the supply becomes exhausted, and as it works automatically I need never look at it, as it does its own work. All needful is to supply water to the cells when evaporation necessitates it."

"But how do you regulate the speed, my boy?"

"From each end of every group of twenty-five cells didn't you notice an insulated wire running through the wall to the pilot-house to the controlling switch, where terminate also similar wires connected with the motor. The switch key is so arranged that by moving it in three different positions three different rates of speed can be gained. It is done by varying the arrangement of each group of twenty-five cells, so that the electro-motive force on which the speed of the motor depends is changed. For example, with 1,000 cells arranged in 500 series, and twenty in parallel, the electro-motive force would be 1,000 volts, and the nominal currents 250. This is the third position. The other two are decreased accordingly so that the force is from two hundred miles an hour down to a mere drag through the air. The helices are independent of the propellers, have as much power, and the wings also have their own individual force. So you see I control each separately."

"Then you can go on storing your accumulators with electricity and keep voyaging in mid-air for an indefinite period?"

"Until food, water or accidents compel us to descend."

"And if you alight suddenly?"

"The flanges fly out along the keel, and a system of flexible springs ease the concussion, while if we strike in the water her hull is of such a buoyancy and smoothness at the runs she is bound to stay at the surface, and the stern propeller will drive her and the rudder steer her as in most ordinary ships."

Frank had hardly given this explanation, when suddenly there came a cry from Pomp, who had been standing up forward looking at the distant mountains, and they all glanced ahead.

"A cyclone!" exclaimed Frank, eying the sky ahead.

"No," said the professor; "it is simply a wind-storm coming over the mountains, but it is a mighty dangerous customer."

"But see," said Frank, "it is but one immense cloud of reddish-yellow dust. By Jove! it looks queer!"

"And it will be queerer for us when it strikes us, Frank. That fine dust has been lifted from some Pacific island or blown from the crater of a volcano in a state of eruption. Carried perhaps thousands of miles by the upper strata of wind; if it falls on a town it would be apt to bury it to a depth of ten feet. Such phenomena is not rare. If we plunge through it the bearings of the Greyhound's machinery may become so clogged that it won't work, and we may go crashing earthward faster than we came up."

Without uttering a single word Frank hurried into the pilot-house.

Grasping the levers, he stopped the advance of the Greyhound, and spreading the huge wings, he almost stopped the helices.

The air-ship began to rapidly descend, while the doctor hastened aft with Pomp, sent May Blossom inside, and with the aid of Matt Mainbrace and Harry Howard, everything was lashed secure.

The erratic movements of the queer dust cloud forestalled them though for it swept toward the air-ship with unexpected velocity, and ere they were a thousand feet nearer the earth, they became enveloped in it.

The wind roared and buzzed around the Greyhound, and those on deck were forced to seek shelter indoors, as the fine particles of dust got in their lungs, as they breathed, and nearly strangled them.

In an instant the vessel was enshrouded, and the dust covered it all over, changing the appearance of everything.

A few moments later there sounded a strange grating noise at the axes of the helices, and at the bearings of the propellers.

An anxious look swept over Frank's face.

Then the wheels began to stick, slip, stick and stop.

The dust was getting in around the bearings, and although the electric pressure kept the wheels spinning, it was obvious that it must soon choke

them so that they would be unable to perform their functions.

Down sunk the Greyhound faster and faster, until it seemed to those upon her that they were falling into a bottomless pit.

Then Frank made a most terrifying discovery.

It was impossible to get away from the dust cloud as the vacuum made by the sinking vessel dragged it down toward the earth.

Yet the young inventor dared not go down faster, nor dared he slacken the descent, and the anxious look upon his face intensified.

He glanced significantly at the doctor, and Van-eyke understood him.

"I fear," he muttered, "that we will have trouble to get out of this!"

Just then there came a fearful shock, and glancing out the window, the youth saw that the Greyhound had struck against something looming up beneath its hull.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EIGHT ACES.

The cries of the others apprised Frank that they were not a little frightened at the accident, and then the air-ship gave a violent lurch and shot over, bow and side foremost.

Grasping the helix lever Frank pulled it, and the wheels began to spin, raising the airship to a level keel.

Then he shoved it in, and the vessel settling slowly down again enveloped in the dust cloud, finally struck the earth.

The flanges sprang out, braced it up, and they saw that it was the ledge of a rocky acclivity which they first touched.

But they made a safe landing, and they saw the dust flit on, falling in great masses here and there along the ground, and then presently the semigloom faded away and the sunlight began to gleam through the reddish mist.

Objects afterwards became plain to them, and gradually they began to discern a number of small houses scattered here and there, while close beside them was a railroad track.

"A settlement!" exclaimed Frank. "Are you all safe?"

The rest replied in the affirmative, and looking out the glass windows they saw a number of rough-looking people come running toward them, while off to the eastward, and subdivided into sections, the dust cloud went rolling along on its course, leaving some of itself scattered over the settlement, while the rest was whirled up into the sky again in masses.

The air remained hazy a while and then gradually cleared off, as the last remains of the dust was blown away.

Frank went out on deck, and saw that the air-ship was coated with dust particles, while a number of the natives of the settlement, all looking like miners, came hurrying toward the air-ship with every evidence of intense curiosity.

There were several men standing at a respectable distance from it when Frank appeared, and he heard one of them cry:

"Sufferin' snakes, ef thar ain't a human critter 'pon ther blamed thing!"

"Mus' be a angel," suggested another, "sense it cum frum heaven."

"But, by gosh, it brung enough sand down from them clouds!" added another.

Frank walked over to the railing and addressed them with:

"Good-afternoon, gents. What town is this, anyway?"

"Jiminey! he torks English!" said the first speaker.

The others rodded, and the man, who seemed to have more courage than the rest, ventured nearer to the Greyhound and said:

"Reckon youse is pilgrims in these yere parts; but howsmever I don't mind a-tellin' yer as ye've lit on Glory Gulch, an' I hopes as yers won't fin' no argyfin' in ther place."

"Mining settlement?" asked Frank.

"I reckon. Who be youse, anyway? Frum heaven?"

"Not quite. This is a flying machine, and we're from the east."

"Sufferin' snakes! we reckoned as the Day o' Judgment hed drapped on us!"

"What district is this, my friend?"

"I kalkerlate we're in Idaho, an' I'm Big Jim wot rules ther roost in Sandy Ellis' shebang yander. I dunno whether yers know wot greased lightning is in your diggings, but if you'll drap inter Sandy's slush-bucket w' me I'll treat ther hull crowd o' yers."

He pointed at the rest who had come out on deck just then, and leered at May Blossom, but Frank had learned all he wanted to know, as he replied carelessly:

"Much obliged, but I've got to get this machine

to rights so I can go sky-scraping again. Good-day, my friend."

The roost ruler looked amazed, and then recovering he cried:

"Hull on thar, pard! Kain't I cum up thar on thet thing?"

"No admittance except on business," replied Frank.

"Now look hyer! I don't never take 'no' fer a anser, d'yer see? An' I'm dretfil curi'us ter see jist wot thet consarn is made of."

As Big Jim said this he tapped the dirty belt which held his red shirt in his patched pants, in which was thrust a brace of huge pistols, as if to signify that a refusal would lead him to use them.

Then he approached the air-ship, and, jumping up, he caught hold of the wire-trellis bulwark to hoist himself on board, when Frank shouted:

"Stand back there, do you hear? It will be the worse if you don't."

"Git out!" grunted the bully of the mining town, hauling himself up.

"Barney," shouted Frank to the Irishman who was in the pilot-house.

"Ay, ay, sor!" replied O'Shea.

"Pull lever No. 5."

"'Tis done, sor!"

"Ouch!" yelled Big Jim.

He received an electric shock that nearly paralyzed him, doubled up, squirmed about, and then suddenly letting go, he fell to the ground, while the other miners fairly howled with laughter and derision.

He did not say a word after he got upon his feet, but bending a look of amazement first at his hands and then at the air-ship, he suddenly took to his heels and ran away.

When he was at a safe distance he yelled to the rest:

"Sufferin' snakes! Scatter! It's from Old Nick, an' stings like blazes!"

Frank ordered Barney to start the electric lights, and, running up in the bow, he turned the searchlight upon Big Jim, half blinding him.

That frightened the others away, and when they were gone Frank turned to his companions, remarking:

"We are rid of those pests for awhile, but they will haunt us as long as we remain, and may do us some injury. The peculiarity of our descent and oddity of our vessel's appearance has stirred them up, so the best thing we can do will be to set to work at once cleaning the machinery so that it will work, and depart from this place."

The others assented, and all hands pitched in vigorously.

But the dust had created so much damage that several days slipped by before their labor was at an end.

In the meantime a strict watch was constantly kept upon the vessel until every one in the town had come and inspected the queer craft which had fallen like a meteor from the sky, dragging down with it the strange dust clouds which had covered the town with its particles.

At the end of the third day, Frank left the Greyhound for the purpose of making an examination of the town, as they were to depart that night, as soon as he returned.

It was not a very large settlement, its chief industry being silver mining in the hill whereon the air-ship first struck, and it consisted of a railroad depot, a grocery store, a score of houses and several drinking saloons, besides the mining property.

It was a cool, clear night, and as Frank walked through the main street, he came to a vile-looking resort bearing the name of Sandy Ellis, wherein was congregated a crowd of noisy miners.

Out of mere curiosity, Frank went into the saloon, and saw that the noisy demonstration was made over the card-tables, at which a number of miners sat gambling.

They glanced at him curiously, as they recognized him as one of the men from the air-ship, but he paid no attention to them, and joining a group clustered round one of the tables, he peered over at the players.

They were two in number, one being Big Jim, and the other a smooth-faced man with a long nose, black hair, and city clothing.

The two were playing draw poker, and as Frank joined the group, he saw that the bewhiskered miner was losing heavily.

The smooth-faced man coolly and quietly pocketed his winnings, and announced that he would play one more deal.

"It is only to give you a chance to get even," said he, quietly.

"An' sufferin' snakes," said Big Jim, swearing roundly at his ill-fortune, "it's high time, too, fer here's ther last ounce o' silver I've got!"

He anted it up, and the stranger, for such he was in the town, shuffled and dealt the cards.

He then anted up, and the miner drew two cards while he drew one.

Big Jim called him at once and laid a hand on the stakes.

"Hold on there, that's mine," said the stranger. "See here!"

"How's this, though, hey?" demanded Jim with an evil leer.

They both flung down their hands, when, to everybody's surprise, each was seen to hold four aces.

That one or the other had cheated was manifest at once, and they accused each other of foul play while a wild howl went up from the crowd, who looked unfavorably at the stranger.

He was a determined fellow, though, for he jerked a revolver from his hip-pocket, covered the miner, who started back and seized the pot.

"Turn over your cards until I see the backs!" he exclaimed.

"Naw I won't!" growled Jim.

"Then I will do it for you," interposed Frank. And reaching out, he did as he threatened in a twinkling.

Everybody saw that Big Jim's four aces were printed on cards with backs much different from those of the deck they had been using.

His flagrant villainy was exposed, but he was not disposed to submit to defeat without a struggle, unfair as it was.

So he drew his own weapon, and was about to fire at the stranger, when Frank gave him a push and sent him reeling.

"Stranger," said he to the smooth-faced man, "I have seen how he cheated you, and I will back you up!"

The man stared at him a moment in surprise, then he recovered himself and replied in constrained tones:

"You'd better not. The whole gang will back him up and murder you. Best to skip. Much obliged though."

"You don't belong in this town, do you?"

"No. Just arrived to-day."

"I thought so. Then you too would perish. Come with me. I'll give you a safe haven of refuge. Hurry up!"

The rest of the gang looked ugly, so, after a glance at them, the man seemed to reluctantly assent, and ran out of the saloon after Frank.

As he passed through the door, Big Jim shot after him, and, catching sight of Frank as he observed that he missed his mark, he cried:

"An' thar's that white-faced brat wot's on ther ship as cum from ther sky, which same did me a poweful hurt t'other day!"

"He's in wi' ther pilgrims, Jim," said one of the men.

"Sufferin' snakes! He'll do us all a sight o' harm if we let 'em go. I've been a-lookin' ter jist this chance ter git 'em off o' that wessel. Come on."

He pushed out the door after the two fugitives, followed by the whole gang, and, as they ran down the street after Frank and the stranger, they began to discharge their revolvers after the two.

In nowise slow to return the fire, Frank and the man reached the Greyhound in safety, and went up the ladder to the deck, where the cause of the trouble was explained to the rest.

This was hardly done, when the gang of drunken miners, headed by Big Jim, came rushing toward the air-ship, some of them carrying small cans of blasting dynamite in their hands.

"They're a hull gang together, pards!" shouted Big Jim. "See thar. They're on that wessel now. Fire ther dynamite cans at 'em, an' blow 'em body an' soul outer Glory Gulch, up ter ther sky ag'in!"

The men raised their fearful missiles, aiming enough of the terrible explosive to blow the Greyhound to pieces.

For an instant Frank and the others were half stupefied with consternation over the peril of their position, for there seemed to be no escape from the almost certain death staring them grimly in their faces.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER.

It seemed as if the doom of those upon the Greyhound was sealed when they saw Big Jim and the miners menacing them with the cans of blasting dynamite.

Quick to forestall the trouble though, Frank turned to May Blossom, who stood beside Harry Howard, and hastily whispered:

"Quick, miss, go and speak to them. They would listen to you. That will give us time to act in self-defense!"

The girl saw that the air-ship might never leave Glory Gulch if prompt action did not ward off the impending danger.

So she ran to the bulwarks with her hand upraised, and cried in quick, piercing tones:

"Stop! Be men! Would you murder a helpless girl?"

The drunken miners were abashed, and lowered their missiles as their gaze fell upon the handsome girl so fearlessly braving them, and they slunk back a few paces.

Big Jim though was sulky, and roared: "Sufferin' snakes! Didn't one o' them pilgrims cheat me out o' my dust? An' when t'other one piled in an' we run an' st, he drapped two o' ther fellers wot wuz with me."

Just then Dr. Vaneyke shot the powerful search light in the faces of the miners, and Pomp having come out of the magazine with several hand-grenades, at Frank's order they were flung among the drunkards and exploded, creating a terrific uproar.

Shouting, injured and panic-stricken, the half-blinded men took to their heels and ran.

Frank had gone to the pilot-house, and the moment he saw there was no immediate danger of being blown up with the dynamite carried by the miners, he pulled the helix lever, the wheels buzzed around, and the air-ship ascended.

All the reddish-brown dust had been removed from the Greyhound, and the machinery worked again as usual.

At an altitude of 6,000 feet Frank brought the Greyhound to a pause, and following the direction of the searchlight which Matt Mainbrace was now managing, he saw all the miners of the Gulch out in the street gazing up at the air-ship.

"They look as if they might be surprised," said the young inventor to the stranger, who stood in the pilot house beside him.

"Scarcely more so than I am," replied the man.

"You are upon an air-ship of my invention."

"Is it quite safe, sir? I confess that I feel rather shaky."

"As safe as if you was on the land. But I say, how came you to be in Glory Gulch, gambling with Big Jim?"

"I arrived there by train, to-day, quite accidentally. The fact is I was on my way to California, to prospect, as I have no future, and have got to earn my living some how or another."

"How would you like to take a trip to Australia with me in this craft, in search for a mountain of gold?"

"By Jove! That is a grand prospect. Can I go?"

"You can if you like. I need one more man, and was going to stop in California for him, but you will do."

"And glad of the chance," eagerly said the stranger.

Frank glanced at him intently a moment.

"It seems to me," said he presently, "that I have met you before."

"Hardly possible, sir. I'm a New Yorker, name of Jack Flush."

"Your face is strangely familiar to me somehow, though."

"Case of mistaken identity," said the other, shrugging his shoulders.

He was a well-proportioned fellow, in city-made clothing, and kept his face shaved clean, his black hair cut short, and had a long nose, black eyes, and a nervous manner.

Frank started the Greyhound ahead, and explained the situation to Jack Flush, after which he gave the wheel to Barney, and went out with the man and introduced him to the others.

Harry Howard was as much struck with Jack Flush as Frank had been, for as soon as the stranger spoke the young man started, bent a piercing glance upon the other, and with a curious look upon his face he asked:

"Haven't I met you before somewhere, Mr. Flush?"

"Mr. Reade asked me the same question. I doubt it, though."

"The tones of your voice are strangely familiar to me."

"How odd! It must be a fancied resemblance, however."

Harry shook his head with a puzzled look.

"Perhaps," he hesitatingly replied. "Yet you so strongly remind me of—of—of— Let me see. Who can it be?"

He pondered a moment, meantime keeping a sharp scrutiny fastened upon the stranger, who smilingly returned his glance; but the effort failed—he could not remember.

May Blossom touched Harry upon the arm.

"I recollect," said she, quietly. "He looks like Ralph Despard."

"Yes, by Jove! so he does!" exclaimed Harry, vehemently.

"Ah! I recall to mind," said Frank. "It was a photograph of your enemy which you showed me, Howard, that made me think I had seen Mr. Flush somewhere before. But then Mr. Despard wore a thick black beard and rather long hair, if the fleet-

ing glimpse I caught of him falling from the balloon, clinging to the parachute, was correct."

"Who is the gentleman you refer to that I resemble?" blandly asked Jack Flush, with a curious expression.

"Oh, he is an enemy of mine," said Harry. "But he must either be dead, or at all events he certainly is many hundred miles from here. Your features and the tones of your voice are strikingly like his. But of course I must be mistaken, as you say, and trust that you will pardon the error."

Jack Flush bowed stiffly, a strangely sarcastic expression upon his face; and looking up smilingly, he replied in careless tones:

"Such mistakes are not at all rare. I have made them myself. And now, Mr. Reade, as I am to become one of your crew, and wish to settle myself, if you will kindly assign me to my quarters, and explain my duties, I will endeavor to do my work to your entire satisfaction."

"You will occupy stateroom No. 9 on deck," said Frank, "and can assist Matt Mainbrace in the general work such as he will explain to you."

The stranger bowed again, and averting his dark face to conceal a sinister smile, he walked off with the old sailor, muttering beneath his breath:

"Safe! I feared exposure. But Ralph Despard's smooth face has saved him. They don't know me. By heavens, this chance luck is wonderful! Landed safe with my parachute, and resolved to seek my fortune in California, I set out, giving up all hopes of ever seeing the air-ship or its passengers again. Stranded for want of funds to proceed further than Glory Gulch, I had to alight from the cars to try my luck with the cards. And by the strangest of all fates, it happened to be that the dust storm had driven the Greyhound to earth at the very same spot. What a queer fatality! It seems as if I am destined to become eventually mixed up in this wonderful voyage. And now I am fully convinced that I am born to be the ultimate husband of May Blossom, and to possess this mountain of gold! No doubt of it. But I must play my cards carefully if I wish to succeed—very carefully. Ah, Ralph Despard, there is a wonderful destiny before you. Chance has thrown the means in my way to gain a wife, and a huge fortune which I covet, and at the same time a chance to avenge myself."

And Ralph Despard, for he the man was, went down in the battery-room with the bluff old sailor, to oil the machinery.

When he was gone, Frank, Harry and May looked relieved.

For an instant a deep silence ensued between them, then Harry, with a serious look upon his face, ventured to remark:

"I distrust that man, Mr. Reade."

"Nor can I say I much fancy him myself, Howard."

"He has a sneaking air, a repulsive glance, and a sarcastic manner," added May Blossom, petulantly, "and for my part I do not intend to have anything to do with him."

A fact that struck the trio singularly, and gave ground to their first suspicions, was that Mr. Jack Flush, although professing some trepidation about the air-ship's safety, he unconsciously seemed to suddenly forget it, exhibit an intense satisfaction at being on the Greyhound, and moreover he appeared to be perfectly at home at that sickening elevation.

People unaccustomed to aerial navigation would invariably become nauseated upon reaching a high altitude, complain of dizziness, buzzing in the ears, difficulty of breathing, and so on.

But Jack Flush made no such complaints.

Indeed, he seemed to be in his element, more than the rest, but they did not suspect that his aeronautic experiences had made the best voyager of him of any upon the aeronef.

Two days passed uneventfully by, when the Greyhound came to a broad stretch of rolling prairie after passing over Fremont's Park, and merging over the State of Nevada.

Miles upon miles of tall prairie grass rolled away in the distance with a dried-up appearance, while here and there herds of cattle could be seen browsing.

"Such a hunting ground!" exclaimed Harry Howard. "If I only had a rifle now, I would so enjoy a shot at those buffaloes, Mr. Reade. I never saw anything like it before."

"There are plenty arms on board," replied Frank, as he leaned over the taffrail with Howard, "and as our store of meat will have to be replenished soon, we might alight here for a couple of hours and give you a chance. But it would be a far easier matter to fling some hand-grenades among them, and simply go for the meat."

"I would be just as well satisfied that way."

"Then I will drop over a grapnel anchor at the end of a long, fine, but strong rope, I use for a cable, and we can descend upon the next herd we meet."

He and Howard went up forward and dropped the drag over, after which they proceeded to the pilot-house.

Taking the management of the air-ship from Dr. Vaneyke, Frank lowered the Greyhound toward the earth.

She descended to within one hundred feet of the ground, and slipped along a short distance where the grapnel caught under the fallen trunk of an immense tree.

As it promised to hold, and there was a large herd of buffaloes but a short distance away, Frank stopped the propellers, and folding the wings he kept the helices going at just sufficient speed to hold the Greyhound up to the limit of her drag.

"Why don't you land her?" asked Howard.

"No. We can go down upon a rope-ladder. Should the herd of buffaloes run this way there is no telling what damage they might do if they struck the ship. Up here she is safe."

"That is so. Ah, and here is Pomp with the grenades."

The negro brought each of them half a dozen of the missiles, and they went down the rope-ladder to the ground, Dr. Vaneyke was left in charge of the Greyhound, and when they alighted they crept in toward the buffaloes, keeping well to that side where the wind could not betray their presence to the keen-scented beasts.

They were fully a mile away, but Frank and his companion soon traversed the distance, and then flung the grenades with unerring precision.

Several loud intonations followed, then a fearful roar as the startled buffaloes took fright, and a moment later there was a terrific commotion among the herd as they scattered and dashed off from the place they were occupying.

"Run!" exclaimed Frank in alarm. "They are coming this way!"

The heavy pounding of hundreds of cloven hoofs fairly made the ground shake, and a billowy mass of surging bodies packed in a dense heap was seen rushing toward the two youths.

"They will trample us to death!" gasped Howard, aghast.

"Not if we reach the Greyhound in time."

"But look! What is that fire and smoke back of them?"

"By Jove, Howard, the exploded grenades have set fire to the dried up prairie grass, and the wind is spreading the flame and driving it toward the air-ship. Horror! If we lose a moment we are lost!"

With the speed of the wind they rushed toward the air-ship, the thundering herd of terrified buffaloes rushing bellowing after them.

The flame spread with lightning rapidity, and shot up in the sky, ran off on both sides, and in a few minutes the roaring crimson tongues of fire and dense volumes of smoke were fairly licking at the clouds as the wind drove it toward the Greyhound.

On ran the two youths as the fearful heat rushed upon them, and faster came the now maddened herd of buffaloes after them, as they realized that they were pursued by the awful fire which had sprung up so unexpectedly.

And to increase the horror of their situation, Frank and Harry saw the air-ship suddenly break from her anchorage and dart up in the air.

CHAPTER VIII.

TREACHERY.

The two imperiled youths came to a pause, and glanced at each other in the most intense dismay.

"We are abandoned to our fate!" exclaimed Frank, pointing at the ascending air-ship. "They have seen the fire sweeping this way, and, fearing that it may overwhelm them, they mean to rise in the air above it and thus escape the impending danger."

"No! No! They would not act so cowardly," gasped Howard. "How could they have the hearts to abandon us this way to our fate? It is too inhuman!"

"Yet the proof is obvious," exclaimed Frank.

"We must not remain here, though. It would be certain death! Can't you hear the pounding of the buffaloes' hoofs—can't you hear their frantic bellows of fear—can't you see the rushing mass of their dark bodies coming toward us? It is death to stay, I tell you! They will crush us. Moreover, the fire is sweeping down upon us with appalling speed, and within a few minutes those raging flames may engulf us in their licking tongues. The fearful, choking smoke will envelop us, and Reade, Reade, we will be strangled to death!"

Courageous as Frank was he could not help realizing that a frightful doom was staring them in the face.

He glanced at the surging buffaloes, then at the raging flames that spread over the eastern heavens like an infernal canopy, and then he turned his glance upon the Greyhound, soaring far above in the sky, and his glance became riveted there.

"It will take but less than five minutes for the flames to reach us, for already I feel their scorching heat, and less than three minutes for that herd of frenzied buffaloes to trample us under their hoofs. But—ah! By heavens, what is this I see?"

"The air-ship is descending," shouted Harry. And he told the truth, for it came down with a fearful rush from the height of nearly a thousand feet in the space of two minutes; the wings flew out, and the trailing drag rope descended near them.

The buffaloes were almost upon them, when they both sprang for the drag rope and seized it.

"All right! Up! up!" shouted Frank.

Evidently the steersman heard them, for the next instant the helices buzzed around, the huge wings beat, and the air-ship ascended just as the whole herd of beasts went rushing pell mell over the spot Frank and Harry had just evacuated by clinging to the rope.

Up into the air shot the Greyhound, the grapnel just passing over the backs of the buffaloes as they went thundering by, Frank and Harry each clinging to the drag rope as the air-ship ascended.

An instant more and they might have been trampled to death beneath those flying hoofs of the terrified beasts.

Clouds of smoke as black as midnight were sweeping toward them, laden with glittering sparks of fire carried up by the wind that swept the flame along.

Up, up, up, ascended the Greyhound, but only half the danger was past, for they yet had to get beyond the reach of the fierce flames that came roaring over the prairie in the form of an enormous shell.

The heat that began to sweep around the aeronauts became almost insufferable, and Frank gasped as he glanced upwards:

"They have taken in the ladder!"

"What shall we do?" asked Harry, in dismayed tones.

"Go up! Climb the rope to the deck. There is no other way to reach it. Besides, it is hazardous to remain here, for when the flames get beneath us we may burn."

"You go first, as you will have to manage the ship when you get there," said Harry.

Not to lose any time in argument, Frank began to climb up the rope in the fast gathering gloom, from the dense clouds of smoke pouring up from the fire.

The Greyhound turned around as he ascended, and darted away ahead of the bellowing fire.

It was a terrible race, for the flames, driven by a swift wind, came sweeping along almost as fast as the air-ship went, upon seeing which Barney kept raising the Greyhound.

Frank glanced down, and a shudder passed over him as he saw the fire overtake the herd of buffaloes, and in an instant the unfortunate beasts were wrapped in the midst of the awful flames.

"It might have been our fate!" muttered the young inventor.

Darker and darker it became all around him, as he slowly climbed up the swaying rope, until at last, enveloped as the ship became in the black smoke, it was hard to see anything more than a yard in advance.

There was a crimson hue to this darkness that came from the fire, but the flames were yet too far away to break entirely through the dense pall.

Up went Frank, and at last he reached the hull, when, upon glancing upward a chill of horror passed over him to see the evil face of Jack Flush peering over the edge of the bulwark down upon him.

He leaned directly over the drag-rope, and there was a sinister expression upon his dark, evil face.

"Hullo! Is that you, Mr. Reade?" he cried.

"Lend me a hand to get up; I'm tired," panted Frank.

"Certainly. Here! We were all anxious about you," said Flush.

He reached over, and Frank grasped his hand, when like a flash his own hand slipped through it, and he only saved himself from pitching over to the earth below by snatching at the rope again and checking the fall.

"Heavens! save yourself!" gasped Flush.

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank, in startled tones.

He hung there panting for breath an instant, and then hoisted himself up to the deck unassisted.

Jack Flush had drawn back with a pale face, and was watching him with an uneasy expression.

Frank recovered and glanced at his fingers.

He started, and a look of intense suspicion crossed his face; then he sprang toward the man, grasped him by the wrist, raised his arm, and exclaimed excitedly:

"Your hand is covered with grease!"

"No, no, it can't be, and yet—"

"Why do you deny it? Look at your hands!"

"True, they are covered! It must be from the machinery."

"I have no grease on the machinery. I use oil."

"Yes, I know. But I was helping the cook, and—accidentally got some lard on my hands, you know, and—"

"That will do, Mr. Flush," said Frank, dryly.

"I hope you do not imagine I did it on purpose?"

"Well, I hope not," said Frank, and bestowing a look of singular interest upon the man he added: "Dry your hands and help Mr. Howard up, if you please. I must hurry to the pilot-house to assume charge of the wheel, so that we can get out of our present danger."

The man muttered some inaudible reply, and Frank hurried away, as he observed that Barney was not handling the Greyhound as skillfully as she should have been managed.

When he was alone Jack Flush turned his face aside with a Satanic smile hovering at the corners of his mouth, and darting a scowling glance after Frank, he hissed softly:

"I nearly finished you then. But I may meet with more success at getting rid of Harry Howard. I have sworn that he shall not live. If I can rid myself of all of you but the girl, it will take me but a short time to gain the knowledge needful to navigate this aeronaut. Then I shall be master of the situation! It will cost me but little trouble to carry out this voyage you have undertaken. I have your map and explanations, and can easily find your mountain of gold. All would then be in my possession. I shall yet conquer in this uneven battle."

He felt the rope shaking beneath him, and knew that Harry was coming up, although he could not see him.

A cunning look crossed his face, a sly, villainous look that boded no good for the youth, for he glanced all around very carefully, and seeing no one near him, he rapidly drew a knife from its sheath in his breast pocket.

Then he tent over the rope with it.

"One cut across these strands," he muttered softly, "and down he goes, his soul in eternity."

Just then Harry came in sight of the man.

He did not see the keen knife held within an inch of the fragile drag-rope, but could just dimly see the outlines of the man's figure.

The Greyhound was darting upward very rapidly, and shooting straight ahead, far in advance of the flames.

The explanation Barney made to Frank was that upon seeing the danger menacing them, the grapnel had been shaken loose, and they raised the Greyhound to go to their aid before the fire or the buffaloes could reach them.

The scene beneath the air-ship was appalling, for the burning prairie spread out an enormous sea of flame that had stretched in every direction, and the roaring sound of the conflagration was borne to their ears distinctly.

Mighty billows of fire were rolling east and west, a crimson glow shading the clouds, and millions of flying cinders and sparks floating amid the smoke banks.

The fire was rushing along at a fearful rate of speed, throwing out waves of scorching heat that were felt by every one on the ascending air-ship.

Fortunately though, the Greyhound was far beyond the reach of the fire, and was momentarily widening the space.

Harry was half exhausted by his climb, and as he discerned the outlines of Jack Flush's figure, he shouted:

"I say, Reade, help a fellow up, will you?"

No reply came from the man, but he crouched back behind the railing to keep his face hidden from Harry's view, and raised his knife to sever the drag-rope.

Nettled at getting no reply, Howard continued up.

"Rather mean of him!" he thought.

Just then Jack Flush's knife struck the rope, and the keen edge glanced over it where it rested on the railing.

There came an ominous rip.

It was cut half in two.

Chagrined, the man raised the knife again, and just as Harry's head appeared in sight, he slashed the knife over the first cut, severing the strand that remained.

This time there was no bungling.

And like a flash the rope went down, and the wretch who cut it rushed away muttering gleefully:

"By heavens, Harry Howard is a corpse now I am avenged!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUEBLE DRUG.

Down shot the rope, the end having been

twisted around Harry Howard's leg, so he could climb easier, just as the youth caught hold of the trellis work of the bulwarks.

His seizing the bulwarks had been simultaneous with the cutting of the rope, so that when it fell he was exceedingly amazed to see it go, and had just saved himself unconsciously from an almost certain death.

Having noticed that the trellis work offered a safer means of gaining the deck, it was to that fact alone that he owed his life, for he had not seen the dastardly work of Jack Flush.

There came a sudden jar as the rope was snarled around his leg—a jerk that nearly tore his hands from their hold, pulling him down with it.

The weight of the grapnel, owing to the extreme length of rope, became enormous, and as he fastened a firmer hold upon the trellis work with his hands, he found that he could but with extreme difficulty sustain himself.

Twice he essayed to pull himself up to the deck, but the efforts were useless, as he could hardly move himself an inch, weighted down as he was.

"I'll have to shout for assistance," he muttered. "It is strange, if that was Frank Reade, that he should go away without offering to help a fellow."

A moment later he shouted lustily:

"Help! Help! I'm falling!"

No reply came at once, and he felt his fingers slipping.

A feeling of intense dismay stole over him. "Hullo!" he shouted again. "Come here! Help a fellow!"

Still no reply, and his heart sank like lead. The weight became unsupportable, and as his fingers slipped further, he closed his eyes, expecting nothing but death.

A groan escaped his lips, and he felt himself falling when suddenly a pair of hands grasped his wrists and his descent was unexpectedly checked.

It was Pomp who had hold of him. "Fo' de Lawd's sake, Massa Howard, youse lone got mighty hebbly fo' a young man ob yo' size!" the darky gasped as he got the full benefit of the weight.

"Oh, Pomp! is that you? See—the drag rope broke and becoming tangled around my leg, it is holding me down," hurriedly replied Howard.

"Hull on dar an' ketch yo' by one arm so yo' can unfix it, sah," said the negro, and the next moment both of his brawny hands grasped Howard's right wrist, leaving the young man free play of his left hand.

He lost no time unfastening the unlucky rope, and a sigh of intense satisfaction burst from his lips as it went whizzing down earthwards.

It was then an easy matter for Harry to get up to the deck by the aid of Pomp.

He had hardly done so, however, when his glance fell upon the severed end of the rope.

A fearful suspicion entered his mind as he picked it up, examined it and then showed it to the negro.

"That don't look as if it broke!" he exclaimed. "Wha' yo' sinnerware by dat, sah?" asked Pomp.

"This rope has been cut,"

"Fo' de lan' sakes—no!"

"Look. It could not break this way."

"Yo' tink dis chile done dis, Massa Howard?"

"No. Of course not."

"I see jes come heah, sah. Heerd yo' callin' fo' help."

"Who was it at the railing a few moments ago?"

"Dunno, sah. I didn't see no one."

"That is queer. Where is Mr. Reade?"

"In de pilot house wid de others, sah."

"I see we are far beyond reach of the fire."

"Fo' shuah! Massa Frank done got de wheel now."

"I will go and explain this matter to him."

"An' I see gwine in de galley to git supper ready, sah."

They separated, and Harry went across the deck, when Jack Flush stepped out from behind the middle deck house.

He started as if he had been stung, when his lance became riveted upon the young man.

"Escaped!" he gasped frantically.

"What is the matter, Mr. Flush?" asked Harry innocently.

The man was a quick witted fellow, and rapidly foresaw that unless he could frame a plausible excuse for that rope being cut, Harry would go and tell Frank, whereupon they would compare notes, and he would get into trouble.

Assuming, therefore, a look of fearful solicitude, he hypocritically fell upon one knee in front of the astonished Harry, and raising his clasped hands heavenward, he cried brokenly:

"Thank God, he is alive! Thank Heaven I am not a murderer!"

"What! Did you cut the rope?" cried Harry, who was fairly amazed.

"Mr. Howard, listen to my confession and forgive an innocent man. Mr. Reade left me to aid you, and I had my unsheathed knife in my belt, as you see it now. I was just leaning over to help you up, when the edge of the knife severed the drag-rope, and I rushed away horrified, as it fell, imagining that I had killed you."

"Ah! So that is how it occurred, eh?"

"It was, indeed; but it was the merest accident."

"I do not doubt it, Jack Flush."

"Say that you forgive an unlucky fellow."

"With all my heart. Rise, man! You need not kneel to me."

"But I beseech you not to mention the matter to Mr. Reade. He might discredit my innocence, and turn me adrift on land again. Pity a poor wretch who has nothing in the world, and I will never forget you for it."

"Why, what a fuss you are making over a simple, unfortunate matter. Why, no, of course I won't say anything if it is going to get you in any trouble, Flush."

"Heaven bless you!" fervently cried the hypocrite.

He grasped Harry's hand and wrung it, and then went down to the engine-room, as he saw Pomp approaching while Howard went up to the pilot house unconcernedly.

He did not mention what happened.

"I see you are safe, Howard?" said young Reade, who held the wheel and had been talking to May Blossom.

"Yes, I'm all right. We missed our buffaloes though."

"But saved our lives. Just look back at the fire. We are leaving it behind fast. As all hands are under shelter I'll show you what the Greyhound can do."

He pulled the driving wheel levers out to their full extent and set the wings in motion, while the helices were put at a rate to keep them at their present altitude.

The air-ship began to drive along so fast that the wind currents fairly shrieked by the ship, and the huge mass of flame astern kept growing smaller and smaller until at last it faded entirely from view.

"Two hundred miles an hour!" exclaimed Frank, enthusiastically, as the enormous speed made the vessel jar and shake. "It is wonderful! Nothing can beat it. If you was on deck, you would be swept away. Call down the speaking tube and warn the others to stay indoors, Howard. If everything wasn't fastened securely on deck, not a thing would remain."

"At what elevation are we?" queried Dr. Van-ey.

"About seven thousand feet. I've got the idea of a machine which would go even faster than this one."

"Faster than this one? Why, it seems impossible."

"Not at all. The idea just occurred to me that I could go all the way around the world in twenty-four hours."

"How do you mean, Frank?"

"First, to explain, you know that the earth turns around on its axis once in twenty-four hours, don't you, doctor?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you know what enormous force might be gained from the magnetic north pole, with a properly constructed machine?"

"I know what its power is on the compass needle."

"Well then, you also know that if a person could construct a means of breathing when beyond the limit of atmosphere that surrounds our earth, the power of gravitation would be lost, and all the heaviest objects would float in space."

"It is believed so, but has not been demonstrated."

"This is my plan then: To construct a magnetic machine which would carry me up straight in there by the force of the polar magnet. The machine could be so constructed that it could contain a sufficient quantity of oxygen air to keep me alive, and it could also be made navigable. Once at the proper altitude, I could hold it there. The earth would spin around beneath me. I could wait just place from whence I started."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders skeptically.

"The idea," said he, "seems plausible, but it is that—the ocean ahead there?"

"The Pacific—and there lies San Francisco."

Frank reduced speed, and sunk the ship lower.

"Are you going to make a landing?" asked the scientist.

"Yes—in the city, or on the outskirts."

"But here is Pomp, to announce that supper is ready."

"All right. We dine on board. You all go down."

I'll stay here, and hold her up over the city till I'm relieved. Then we'll descend."

The doctor and all the rest went into the handsomely appointed saloon aft, where Pomp had spread a tasteful repast, and as they all took their seats and pitched into the food, Jack Flush's face wore a sardonic smile, and he muttered:

"Every morsel but my own is drugged. Within ten minutes you will all be asleep and at my mercy. Then to subdue Frank Reade, Jr., and the ship will be in my hands. How fortunate that I am an adept at these subtle compounds, and a greater blessing that I had a vial of it in my pocket."

The party at the table was merry, and the bracing cold air sharpened their appetites, so that they ate with voracity.

But before half the food had been disposed of, one by one they fell fast asleep in their chairs, until all were helpless before the gloating eyes of the rascally mischief-maker.

He sprang to his feet, glanced at them triumphantly, and pulling a revolver from his pocket, he muttered:

"It has worked like a charm. The situation mine! And now to steal up behind Reade, and put a bullet in his back. All the rest I can throw from the ship save the girl for whom I have run this risk, and then—"

His sibilant chuckle finished the sentence, combined with a diabolical look on his face, and clutching the pistol in his hand, he crept out on deck to murder Frank Reade, Jr.

CHAPTER X.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GREYHOUND.

RALPH DESPARD, or "Jack Flush," as he was known to the aerial navigators, had made the most of his time on the Greyhound, and bade fair to succeed in his designs.

Everybody upon the air-ship was fast asleep, under the influence of the powerful drug administered in their food while the wretch had been aiding Pomp to prepare the supper, and only Frank Reade, Jr., and himself were awake.

And, with his revolver clutched in his hand as he left the dining-saloon, Jack Flush stole toward the pilot house to deliberately assassinate the young inventor, so that he might gain sole mastery of the Greyhound and its passengers.

Within the saloon around the table his victims had fallen in various postures, under the influence of the powerful narcotic poison he had introduced into their systems.

The drug was a narcotic, acting on the brain and producing sleep. Its compounds being chiefly opium and morphine, the effect of which had been felt within twenty minutes after taking it.

The sensations of Jack Flush's victims commenced with giddiness, drowsiness, stupor, and then insensibility, all appearing to be sound asleep—a loud noise capable of arousing any of them, although they would quickly relapse into unconsciousness again.

Their breathing was slow and stentorian, countenances livid, pulse feeble, pupils of the eye contracted to the size of a pin's point, and insensible to the stimulus of light.

A physician would have said there was great turgescence of the brain's vessels, effusion of serum into the ventricles, the lungs gorged with blood, and the right side of their hearts distended with dark fluid.

The balloonist knew just the proper quantity to give them without causing death, and when he was out on deck, and glided toward the pilot house he observed that the air-ship had come to a pause directly over the city of San Francisco.

The helix spirals were whirling around at the top of the six shafts, and the propellers had stopped their revolutions.

The severed drag-rope end was lying near where Jack Flush stood, and as his glance fell upon the remnant he saw that it could betray him, so he rapidly unfastened it from the ring-bolt in the deck, to which it was tied, and flung it overboard.

Then he peered ahead at the glass pilot-house. Frank was not in it.

A cold chill seemed to strike the schemer.

He heard Frank walking toward the saloon on the other side of the middle deck-house, and a cold perspiration burst out all over him as he realized that the young inventor would behold his work, miss him from the rest, and combining this event with the other things he had done, suspect him.

"I am baffled again!" he hissed. "What shall I do? If I am seen to be the only one not under the influence of the drug he will certainly say I fixed the others. He is quick to act and would not hesitate to shoot me on the spot!"

He looked like a cornered animal for an instant, and dared not steel after him to shoot him now, for the youth might suspect treachery at once and have his own pistol in readiness.

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That the game was lost, the rascal could but acknowledge.

"I must let it go, feign the same condition as the rest, and await my chances for some other time!" he muttered.

He pocketed his revolver, and flinging himself prone upon the deck, he simulated the appearance of his six victims.

Nor was any too quick about it, for Frank had seen that there was trouble, missed Jack Flush, and came out to look for him.

"In heaven's name, what can be the meaning of this?" Frank had muttered, as his startled glance fell upon the sleeping people in the saloon. "All are insensible—but, no! Where is Jack Flush? He is not among them! There is some treachery at hand. I distrust that fellow, somehow. But I'll find him, and if I learn that he is playing any underhanded work here, I'll—"

He did not finish the sentence, but there was a singularly grim look upon his face, as he hurried out on deck.

Frank glanced up and down, and saw Flush lying prone upon the deck beside the storerooms.

"He, too, is asleep!" he muttered. "Then I must be mistaken. If he had done any act of violence, he would of course have protected himself. I'll examine him."

He approached the shamming rascal, knelt down at his side, and after a desultory examination, he came to the conclusion that the man was insensible.

Hurrying into the cabin, he brought out a flask of liquor, and forced some of it into the stranger's mouth.

The youth was obliged to resort to several different measures before he was able to revive the man.

Then Jack Flush acted very stupidly, for he was mute and dazed when he finally sat up, and glanced around.

"I say!" exclaimed Frank, for the sixth time. "What's the matter?"

"Matter?" said Flush, half incoherently. "I do—not—know."

"Are you sick?"

"Yes—very sick, sir."

"Drink some more of this brandy."

Flush did so, and it seemed to imbue him with more animation, for he arose, leaned against the deck-house, and asked:

"What in the world has happened?"

"That is just exactly what I want to find out," said Frank.

"Ah! Let me see—that food—yes! I've got it!"

"Got what? You were all fast asleep."

"Were we? I thought it might have been we were all poisoned. As soon as we ate supper we dozed off. Still, it seems to me that the atmosphere might have had something to do with it, too. What do you think, Mr. Reade?"

"We are not high up enough to suffer numbness, and it is the cold upper air that causes it, and brings on a comatose state. It therefore can't be that, but I suspect that some of the canned food may have brought the trouble about. Come; let us attend to the others, or they may die for want of care."

Frank hurried into the cabin with the man, and found Pomp sitting up, staring in amazement at the rest.

"Fo' de Lawd sake, wha' de mattah?" he gasped, as his rolling eyes rested for a moment upon Frank.

"Some drug in the food has overpowered you, Pomp."

"Bress de lamb dat I see a niggah, Massa Frank."

"What for, Pomp?"

"Kase niggahs got mighty tough stomach. Kaint kill a niggah, nohow. Niggah eat tacks, 'n' pizen, 'n' chaw lightnin'; but 'pears like yo' kaint kill 'em—no sah—dat's a fact!"

He arose, rather shaky on the legs, carefully felt of his stomach, and wondering whether it might burst or not, he went to the assistance of Frank and Jack to revive the others, who by this time showed some signs of returning animation under the stimulus of the liquor.

Within a short time they were all resuscitated, but the wily trickster had taken hasty precautions to get rid of all traces of the drug he had given them.

When they had all regained their senses the matter was discussed, but no definite explanation could be formed as to the cause, so they finally dismissed it from their minds.

A good landing place was selected, and Frank went into the pilot-house with Barney to lower the air-ship to the earth.

"I've got a number of purchases to make," he told the Irishman, "and must get in a supply of food, for our flight over the Pacific will be a long one."

"Shure an' I hopes we won't git say-sick," said

Barney, with a broad grin. "But, Masther Frank, I've ben in ther batterry-rume-a-luckin' at ther indiatehers, an' I'm av a moind as yer will have ter schortse yer jars wid electricity, for it's arlmosht exhasted it all is, includin' ther resarve wans."

"Yes, I know it, Barney. There is not enough electricity left to carry the Greyhound two hours longer. The jars that feed the helices are better supplied than those controlling the propellers, so that although I can hold her up in mid-air two hours longer, I could not drive her ahead more than one-third that space of time. There we go—down again!"

The Greyhound spread her great wings, the helices revolved slower, and the great air-ship slowly and gracefully sunk earthward with every one on deck.

Fortunately the night grew dark, so no one saw the air-ship from below, and she came down in an open grassy spot on the outskirts of the peninsular city with a gentle shock as the flanges flew out and the wings folded in.

They were within the grounds of some large estate, and a gentleman presently came up to the ship carrying a lantern.

He was vastly amazed, but Frank alighted, and soon made matters clear to his comprehension.

He then told them that they were in his stock yard, and had no objection to the ship remaining until they chose to go away again.

After he had been shown the air-ship he went back to the house with the whole party and ordered one of his men to hitch a horse to a wagon and drive them all into the city and back again for their shopping.

Matt Mainbrace and Jack Flush decided to remain behind to watch the Greyhound, so Frank and all the rest drove away, enjoining them to be careful not to meddle with the apparatus in the electrical room.

Once in the city, May Blossom was provided with suitable clothing, and the rest procured all that was needed, when speed was made back to the stock farm again.

It was nearly midnight when they drew near the place, and they were deeply engrossed in conversation, when the driver suddenly exclaimed:

"Geel! what's that?"

With one accord the aerial navigators all glanced ahead, and a simultaneous cry of alarm burst from every mouth at the startling sight presented to their view.

The Greyhound was darting up into the air.

Brightly illumined by the electric lights, a vision of beauty and grace, the wonderful air-ship soared skyward before the dismayed group in the wagon.

"Faith an' we're left intirely!" gasped Barney.

"I fear," said Frank in tremulous tones, "that the ship is lost. Whether she has gone up by accident or design is a mystery to me, but the propellers and helix power is almost exhausted, and she will soon fall, and that will end her."

Up, up she went, and they watched her anxiously for ten minutes as she fled westward; then Frank suddenly groaned:

"See! See! She is falling now—falling into the sea!"

And he told the truth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ELECTRIFIED OFFICERS.

The dark waters rushing in through the Golden Gate from the Pacific Ocean into the Bay of San Francisco, bore a row-boat of large size, in which sat Frank and his friends.

The wagon had taken them from the stock farm that laid south of the city, in that district between School House Station and San Bruno, to Point Lobos, and then they embarked in the boat with all their purchases.

The air-ship had fallen off Point Bonita, and was floating.

"If she is uninjured, we can easily get possession of her again," said Frank, grimly, "for she will float like a duck."

"Bedad, there's the dicken's own flotilla av boats schtamin' up to her," said Barney, who stood up in the bow.

The two hired oarsmen strained every muscle, and in the course of half an hour they were across the mile width of the Golden Gate, and ranged up amid the tugs and small boats whizzing about the air-ship.

It was evident that every one was curious about the Greyhound, yet were all afraid to approach too near the strange, illuminated craft which had fallen down from the skies to float in their midst.

The big row-boat ranged alongside, and Frank saw Matt Mainbrace and Jack Flush standing on deck shouting to the captains of the boats to come to their aid.

Making the row-boat fast alongside of the Greyhound, Frank hastily made his way up on deck.

"By gol!" shouted the old sailor, recognizing

him, and rushing up to him. "Blow me if 'er ain't Mr. Reade."

Jack Flush turned deathly pale, and began to tremble.

"By heavens," he muttered, "I hope he won't find out that I started the machinery in hopes of stealing the ship during his absence; but I'll face it out as best I can."

He had been horrified and disgusted to find that the electrical force had all been used up, and feared death when he found the air-ship falling; but he did not know at the time that the accumulator jars had been emptied of their power.

"Glad to see you, Reade!" he panted, rushing up to Frank and grasping his hand. "We've had a narrow escape, sir."

"Is the ship injured?" eagerly asked Frank.

"We came down with a shock that half stunned us," explained the man, "but I'm blest if I know how things are."

Frank said no more, but rushed away and made a quick examination of everything.

"By jove, this is lucky!" he exclaimed. "Not a thing injured. The water saved her. And now to find out why she fell."

He hurried out on deck with the gratifying news, and told the others to come up on deck, after which he paid the boatmen, all the stores were transferred on board the Greyhound, and he turned to Matt Mainbrace with:

"And now, old fellow, can you tell how this trouble occurred? The ship would not have risen if some one had not started her up skyward."

"By gol," said the old sailor, with a hitch at his trousers, "you're axin' ruther a poser, sir. Buts I reckon as she went up o' her own accord, fer while me an' Flush stood watch forward here them wheels suddenly spinned aroun', and up we went like a shot."

"Queer! But he is an honest old fellow," said Frank, softly.

"But the 'honest old fellow,'" muttered Jack Flush, audibly, "did not see me fasten two wires to the levers before that, by pulling upon which I easily drew the levers out while standing beside him out on deck. It was no trouble to get them off afterward, either, my fine fellow, so you, Frank Reade, are puzzled."

The row-boat left the side of the air-ship, and Frank went down into the battery-room, started the dynamo machine and began to generate a new supply of electricity in the accumulator jars, in order to proceed on his voyage.

None of the vessels thereabouts ventured near them until a revenue tug came steaming up alongside.

"Ahoj, there!" shouted the captain. "Catch this line. We want to board you. D'yer hear!"

"Sorra abit!" replied Barney, distrustfully.

"Who is it?" asked Frank, approaching.

"Shure, an' that barred flag ought answer yer."

"A revenue tug! And those nosey officers will come on board and go poking down amid our machinery and see how this craft is constructed. I won't have it, Barney."

"Thin it's the Frinch laive I'd be after takin' av thim."

"There is not enough electricity on board yet to do it, my boy."

"Faith, it won't take much longer ter git it though."

"About ten minutes."

"Then it's howldin' thim off I'll be doin'."

"How can you—"

"Ahoj, there!" interposed the port officer on the tug, gruffly. "We want to board you—do you hear?"

"Whist! Be alsy!" exclaimed Barney. "We're fresh from ther clouds av Heaven, an' divil a contraband breeze or schtar is it we're wantin' ter schmuggle inter ther port, sor, so y'd better kape away orderly an' dacint awhile, as we want no callers this avenin', d'yer moind, me jewel?"

The officials had their curiosity aroused about the strange craft, and their dignity offended at Barney's curt reply.

It simply incensed them with augmented determination to board the Greyhound, so they steamed up alongside of her.

Frank had been obliged to go into the pilot-house, to watch the indicators there of the operating dynamo, but he had every confidence in Barney's ability of getting rid of the officers.

"We are the port officers," announced a fat man as the tug swung alongside, "and demand of you in the name of the law not to resist our examination of that craft. Now boys make ready the port stern hawsers—quick!"

Two men rushed aft on the tug, with a huge rope clutched in their hands, and Barney shouted warningly:

"Moind yez now, it's warned yez be's, an' if anny wan av yez gits in throuble, shure yer has only yerself ter blame."

"Stow your jawin' tackle," admonished another

individual brusquely, or we will lodge you in jail—d'you see?"

Barney said no more, but ran into the stowage-room and emanated with a wire in his hand which he fastened to a binding-post on the brass capped ulwark.

There was a grin upon his face as he watched the Custom House officer's men preparing to come on board with the hawsers, to hold the tug beside the air-ship.

"Master Frank!" he exclaimed a moment afterwards.

"Well, Barney?" queried the young inventor from the wheel-house.

"Pull lever No. 7, if you please, sor."

"Look out, Barney—there is a heavy battery n."

"Bejabers an' its paralyzed thim min'll be, soon."

He was careful not to touch the bulwarks, the tops of which he had electrified, but the deck-boards of the tug holding the hawser seized it to spring on board.

Then there came a chorus of wild yells.

"Howly sufferin' Pether!" chuckled Barney, fairly dancing with delight. "Shure an' they're chutuck to it lolke glue."

The shocked tug-boat men were clutching wildly at the rail bellowing, kicking and prancing, but unable to let go.

"They must be mad," said the chief port officer, in surprise.

"Oh, oh! Help! Help!" yelled the unfortunate men.

"Get on board of her!" roared the captain.

"No, no! Take us away!" howled one of the men.

"They've suddenly gone crazy," said the fat officer.

He and the captain each seized a man to drag him away from the railing, when they too felt the current, and, becoming fastened to the deck-hands in a clutch which it was impossible for them to relax, they, too, began to shout and swear and beg to be released.

By this time every one on the Greyhound except Frank and Pomp was out on deck with Barney, laughing and writhing men, while the crew of the government boat all came crowding around to learn the cause of the furious uproar.

"What ails you?" asked one of the officers.

"These rails," groaned one of the unlucky ones, "are electrified."

"Ha! This is an indignity to the law, by jingo," he man exclaimed. "There must be something wrong about that vessel, if they resort to such a desperate measure as this to resist us."

"Shall we fire on them, sir?" eagerly asked one of the men.

"Ay," yelled the imprisoned captain furiously, "shoot 'em down!"

Out flashed half a dozen revolvers from the pockets of the rest, and an instant later Barney and the rest were covered.

"Stop the flow of that electricity," hoarsely cried one of the officers, "or I will shoot you down like logs."

Barney did not flinch from his fixed object though.

He wanted to gain time, and would get it at any hazard.

"Arrah, it's a ruction they're wantin'," he shouted, "an' we'll give it to thim! Shoot away, yer blaguarders!"

"No! No!" roared the captain. "Don't shoot him. They may kill us!"

The men stood irresolute, and Barney cried:

"How's she a fillin', Master Frank?"

"Fast," returned the young inventor from the pilot-house.

"Keep them off a couple of minutes more and we can go."

"Be ther hokey it's an hour I'll do it if yer oikie."

"Release us, for pity's sake!" wailed the fat officer.

"Kape sthilla, me bye, an' it's all roight yez soon all be."

Just then Pomp came out on deck attracted by the noise.

"Bress my soul, Barney, wha' de mattah heah, money?" he asked.

"Just be affther axin' thim roarin' gintlemin," replied O'Shea.

He pointed at the four sufferers, and winked at Matt Mainbrace, and Pomp hurried unsuspectingly over to the rail, and innocently laid his hands upon it before the prisoners, to question them, when he received a sudden shock that fairly straightened out the kinks in his hair.

"Huh! Wow! Fo! the lan' sakes!" he roared, kicking up his heels and cavorting around as his grip tightened on the rail. "Le' go dar! Lo' go!"

Barney's mirth became so intense that he fairly doubled up with laughter; but unluckily for him

the seat of his pants touched the uninsulated electric wire and broke it.

He gave a wild whoop, clapped his hand to the almost burned spot, sprang up into the air, and fell flat on the deck.

"Mother av Moses," groaned he. "It's frizzled an' kilt I be's!"

The current was broken and his victims were instantly released.

The Custom House officers were fairly savage over their rough usage.

"Go for them!" shouted the infuriated fat chief.

"Arrest them all. Shoot down everybody who resists. We will pay them for this!"

A hoarse cry from the rest followed this remark, and with a rush the men came toward the rail of the Greyhound, knowing it was no longer electrified, and flourished their pistols as they ran.

The next moment several of them sprang upon the air-ship's deck.

CHAPTER XII.

OVER THE OCEAN.

FRANK saw that he must get in trouble if the officers once got the best of him, and an expression of intense anxiety flashed over his face as he glanced at the indicators.

"Jars only half charged," he muttered, desperately. "But I must risk an ascent. If I wait another minute we are lost. Besides we can keep charging them while going."

He pulled the helix lever, there came a sudden whirl of the spiral wheels, but the suction of the water held the hull of the Greyhound down in the water.

It jarred the vessel, and the sudden shock so alarmed the rest of the officers who were about to board the air-ship that they recoiled, and the ones on deck uttered exclamations of fear.

Further out came the lever, and faster buzzed the helices.

The water under the hull was sucked up in a pyramidal heap beneath the hull of the Greyhound, and the wash of the waves drifted the government tug away, as she was not moored beside the air-ship.

Then, with a frightful swash, the hull parted from the water, and with the brine dripping in torrents from her keel she bounded up in the air above the sea.

The three officers on the deck were horrified, and, with wild cries of affright, they dashed over to the bulwarks, for they did not understand what was occurring to the air-ship.

"Over wid 'em!" shouted Barney. "Hurroo! Erin-go-bragh! Inter ther say wid the duffers, Pomp, yer blamed could nagur!"

He spit on his hands, made a rush at one of the men, caught him by the slack of his trowsers, and gave him a sudden fling that shot him over the bulwarks.

Down into the water he dropped like a cannon-ball.

Pomp became excited, and, emulating the Irishman's example, he pounced upon another of the frightened men and sent him flying after the first one.

"De Lor' gorryamity!" chuckled the dorky. "Dar he go! Sock it to dem, Barney! Heah am anudder one. Oh, golly!"

Both he and the Irishman made a rush for the remaining officer, and caught hold of him together.

Each one caught an arm, and pulled in an opposite direction, when there came two sharp rips, each sleeve of the officer's coat was torn from the shoulder seam, and each grasping a sleeve, out of which the terrified man had wrenched his arms, went flying backwards head over heels on the deck.

Sleeveless, the man scrambled up on the bulwarks, and, with a frantic leap, he followed his companions down into the sea where they were all picked up by those on the tug.

Up shot the Greyhound, higher and higher into the air until she gained a height of one thousand feet above the sea when Frank started the propellers, and the graceful air-ship sped away westward over the ocean.

The people on the boats gazed in open-mouthed astonishment after the immense floating mass of steel blazing like a huge ball of electric fire, as it fled through the air, and wondered if it had not been some strange visitant from another world.

The land was left far astern, and soon vanished from sight altogether in the distance, and the voyagers found themselves launched upon their long journey over the trackless sea, exposed to many dangers of another sort.

"A narrow escape," observed Frank to Harry Howard. "If those fellows had once gained admission to my boat they might have stolen my ideas. Moreover, enraged as they were by Barney shocking them with electricity, they might have arrested us, detained us, and annoyed us by end-

less devices far from agreeable. And it is mighty lucky too that the Greyhound suffered no damage from the last flight she took."

"There was something mysterious about that matter to me."

"You are right. There is a reason for everything. I know, Howard, that the ship could not have gotten in motion unless the levers started her. There is no possible way for an electrical circuit being completed excepting by operating the levers. Yet both Mainbrace and Flush deny having touched them."

"I am not superstitious, Mr. Reade," said Howard, in serious tones, "but do you know that I firmly believe Jack Flush is a typical Jonah, for ever since you have had him on board, there has happened a series of dangerous events that might have cost us our lives. Haven't you noticed it?"

"Yes, I distrust the fellow. But there is no remedy for the evil. He is on board at my own invitation. So he will have to accompany us to the end of our voyage."

Harry went out on deck just as Dr. Vaneyke entered the pilot house, and Frank called down the speaking-tube to Barney and Pomp to go into the electric storage-room and watch the piles and accumulators until the indicators announced the jars to be completely stored; when they were to shut off the dynamo machine.

Frank laid his course by a map and the compass, so that any quarter master could steer the Greyhound on her way with unerring precision.

"This ship is filled with electricity," observed the doctor, "and it is queer that it don't effect the sensitive compass needle."

"Oh, I've got the compass so insulated that it can't," said Frank, with a smile. "See—the box is made of gutta percha, and glass covers the top and bottom. If I hadn't taken due precautions, sir, the needle would wobble and act like all the iron work on the ship, told of in the Arabian Nights. When the vessel came near the lode-stone mountain in the sea, all the metal flew out, adhered to the magnetic mountain-side, and the ship fell to pieces and sank. I am amply protected, though."

"Yes, as far as the compass goes. But how about the electricity in the air? Lightning and voltaic electricity are identical, you know. Consequently you drive this ship by lightning stored up in jars. The proof is that we can draw sparks from a Ruhmkoff's coil."

"It is a serious matter," said Frank gravely, "as our past experience showed us in the storm cloud as to what effect the loose lightning playing at random in the atmosphere, would be capable of doing when brought in contact with that which I make and utilize. This vessel being made of steel naturally attracts it with extreme violence, just as a huge lightning rod on a house would do."

"There must be a way to insulate it," said the professor. "It also has a disadvantage of attracting the cold and holding it. Now if we were to get in that region of the atmosphere from whence fall those mighty pieces of ice, so big and heavy a man can scarcely lift one, I tremble at our chances for safety from being frozen to death."

"Oh," said Frank, "I have a means of generating enough heat from the electric fluid to overcome the most intense cold, and the same power in hot climates will work fans for me all over the ship to keep us cool and comfortable."

"You have not forgotten two important factors then. The clouds of the atmospheres I mention are composed, you know, of very fine penetrating needles of ice, almost microscopical, and in those complex, dangerous parhelios, anthellias and lunar haloes, we might, if unprepared, run dangerous risks. Indeed I might say as much for the torrid zone of Australia, whither we are bound, if the heat attempted to battle with us."

"We have now mostly lightning to fear you think?"

"Yes, indeed. That Prussian, Giessler, has invented tubes in which it is possible to see with what facility lightning circulates in a wide sheet, as soon as the air becomes less dense. The result is that we have less to fear high in the air than low where it is dense, for it usually goes down where it don't belong. The edges of the clouds especially conceal immense quantities of electric matter that dart out of their ambush like assassins to strike unexpectedly. Why, lights in the tropics emerge from crests of waves and illumine the shores. There is lightning in everything, Frank."

"I tried an experiment," said the young inventor "of evaporating some drops of water in a capsule to which I added black liquid, and the vapor produced numberless little globules, consisting of envelopes of liquid, each separated from its neighbor by a small layer of air. Dew is formed in the same way in the atmosphere overhead, rising and falling according as the atmospheric layer beneath is warmed or chilled, I have heard."

"Yes, I've tried it myself, Frank, and I concluded that the continuous light sent to us by the

and would not be so vivid unless the vapors upon it were so intensely thick," said Dr. Vaneyke.

He went out shortly, but what he said set Frank to thinking what an immense affinity there was between the ocean under him and the lightning storms above him, to which the ship was exposed.

On the third night from land they had covered a distance of two thousand miles of clear weather, passing over the Sandwich Islands in the tropic of Cancer, and kept on for the Mulgraves, where the Greyhound was to turn south for the Friendly, and thence pass on between the New Hebrides and New Caledonia Islands.

It was early in the evening, and the air-ship, a thousand feet above the sea, was speeding toward an enormous mass of cirri clouds, with Barney at the wheel and the others lounging about the deck, amusing themselves in various ways.

The Irishman had his hands on the handsome wheel and his glance fixed searchingly upon the cloud banks ahead, when he suddenly felt a peculiar downward motion of the Greyhound.

"Howdy Mary!" he muttered in startled tones, "wot's that?"

The wheel gave a wrench and the vessel shot into the clouds, when Barney increased the speed of the helices to rise above it, when he found that the ship began to strain, as if trying to tear itself up from the clutches of some mighty giant.

An oscillating movement began, and the Greyhound creaked at every joint as she tore her way through the cloud.

Instead of rising, though, she began to sink toward the sea, as if the weight of the cloud was bearing her down, and then she suddenly darted like an arrow, with the down-drifting cloud at an oblique angle, straight toward the waves.

Frank came rushing into the pilot-house, and the others ran to the bulwarks and peered down at the darkening sea.

The column of cloud approached nearer and nearer the water, hanging down from the rest in a black, threatening mass, when the waves beneath it became turbulent and frothy.

Then, in spite of the earth's gravitation, the waves formed in an immense billow, the excrecence rising and rising to meet the down-hanging column of vapory cloud, the magnetic force of which was pulling the Greyhound along with it and the fast growing wave at the same time.

The cylindrical cloud was a half mile in length, the sea wave boiling furiously beneath it, yet all nature around it was serene.

Suddenly the incipient column of cloud met the sea wave and darted upward with it, gyrating furiously, and causing the air-ship, which was drawn within a short distance of it, to begin to whirl.

A lugubrious yellow tint lit up the fearful spectacle.

"It's a waterspout!" shouted Frank as he dashed into the pilot-house and the others sought shelter under cover. "A waterspout, Barney, and by heavens it is dragging us within its coils, and may tear the Greyhound to pieces before we can save ourselves."

CHAPTER XIII.

BURSTING THE WATERSPOUT.

CAUGHT in the powerful clutch of the waterspout which had so suddenly formed between the cloud and the Pacific, the Greyhound was whirled up into the air.

The down drooping column of cloud had begun to whirl, and catching the upreared pillar of water it dragged it up in an immense spiral, around which the air-ship was gyrating with the most erratic movements.

The early evening light was clear enough to show Frank the situation, as he dashed into the pilot-house and took the spokes of the wheel from Barney.

All the others on the Greyhound had gone into the cabin, excessively frightened at their danger.

"Three uneventful days out from San Francisco," Frank muttered, "and now this calamity has to occur! Truly, Harry Howard's premise that Jack Flush is a Jonah seems to be verified, and most strenuously, too."

"Milla murder!" groaned Barney, "but wot does this mane."

"We are caught in a waterspout, I tell you."

"Be jabers, it's plain enough as we're up a spout av some kind."

"And if the Greyhound has not got power enough to resist it, this vast column will tear it to pieces."

"Thin howld her off, sor, howld her off."

"I'll try. She has only got half power on. We are rushing skyward with fearful velocity. Once the vacuum draws us within that whirling column nothing can save us, Barney. Heavens! How the Greyhound is rattling! Here—I'll try to force her ahead, out of the influence of this terrible monster, Barney, it is our only chance, I think."

He drew the propeller lever out to its fullest extent and the air-ship dragged itself ahead, the screws beating so furiously as to jar the ship from stem to stern.

But the force of suction was not to be so easily overcome, for although she kept at a greater distance from the waterspout, she still described great circles around and around it in a threatening manner.

Frank only considered the matter a moment.

Then his mind was made up, and he pulled out the helix lever, and the revolving air-ship mounted higher and higher as it wound around the great rushing mass of water, until it reached the cloud.

"We must be prepared for a desperate chance now," said the youth. "Call down the tube to the others to remain inside. I am going out on deck to break that spout, Barney. Be careful now."

He took a dynamite cartridge and, leaving the pilot-house, he reached a small brass gun near the search-light, opened the breach, and loaded the piece.

The Greyhound was making shorter revolutions at the apex of the water spout, and acted very eccentric.

Awaiting his chance, he discharged the gun at the column; a dull reverberation followed, and then there sounded a terrifying roar—a hissing like steam pouring from the valve of a monster engine—and he felt something strike him a violent blow.

Instinctively he flung out his hands and grasped the railings, his senses never deserting him for a moment.

The Greyhound gave a violent lurch, and he felt that he was suddenly enveloped in a mighty mass of water.

The next instant the air-ship capsized.

For a brief space Frank was hanging by the rail, feet downward in space, the air-ship over his head.

The Greyhound began to fall like a thunderbolt for an instant, and then she suddenly came to a sudden and violent pause an instant later.

She was beaten down, pounded and hurled earthward.

Then she had suddenly spun around in the dense mist, regaining her equilibrium, and the machinery began to pound, and she righted herself and floated again in a zig-zag fashion upward and onward.

Frank again found himself lying on the deck, with the Greyhound under him once more, fairly breathless.

He was bewildered in the sudden and violent action, but it all transpired in so brief a space that he found himself safe while wondering vaguely if his friends were not all standing upon their heads when the ship turned over.

He bounded to his feet and glanced around.

A crash reached his ears, coming up from below as if a thousand batteries of artillery had been discharged at once.

It came from the falling mass of water.

He saw that the waterspout was broken and gone.

It was the descending water that deluged him and turned the Greyhound over in the air by its enormous weight, and he saw the sea spring up, lashed to fury where the fallen columns had hit the surface, and then rush off in a mighty tidal wave to the eastward.

The sky above was serene, a huge cloud sailing peacefully along, and all nature around looked as if something unusual had happened, save for a mass of mist hovering over the water and drifting along.

Everything on the air-ship was drenched.

In the forward window of the pilot-house the scared face of Barney suddenly appeared with his cap jammed down over his ears, much as if he had struck the floor on his head, and he peered hard at Frank.

The air-ship was going at a fearful rate, and the wind was shrieking past Frank like an avalanche.

He staggered across the deck, and crept into the pilot-house.

"Barney, my boy, we are all right now," he gasped, as he reduced the rate of speed at which they were traveling and began to sink the Greyhound from the enormous height to which she had mounted.

"Begob she's an acrobat, turnin' sich somersaults in the air, sor," said Barney.

"But an unerring one. Luckily she has a ballasted keel, else we might have hurtled down into the sea upon our heads."

"An' there's ther dickins av a schquawkin' down in ther cabin—listen."

"It is May Blossom's voice. Doubtless all are terrified."

"Be aisy! It's arl roight now!" yelled Barney, through the speaking tube. "Faith we're floatin' along wid the wind, so we are, an' it's batin' it ter Austrailay we are, too."

An anxious answer came back, and hearing that

all were safe, they were told to come out if they liked, whereupon all hands complied, and the matter was talked over all the night long by the aeri voyagers.

The Greyhound had not suffered any damage and Frank was heroized for his skill until it made him weary.

"Since the first account of aerial navigation which was that of Archytas's flying artificial pigeon mentioned by the historian Aulus Gellius, of the Brazen Age, nothing ever happened like it before," said Dr. Vaneyke. "Frank, your nerve is wonderful."

"Verily," was the sneering thought of Jack Flush, as he walked out on deck, "he is a nob hero. But his reign of triumph will be very short-lived if my plans prove successful."

There was a dark, evil look upon his face, and thinking that he was unobserved, he shook his clenched fist in the direction of the pilot-house.

"Golly, Massa Flush! Who yo'se agoin' ter h sah?"

It was Pomp who spoke, and the guilty man started.

He glanced around hastily and saw the old dark emerge from the store-room close behind him.

"Oh, Pomp—you, is it? Ha, ha, ha! You startled me. I was just shaking my fist at that ugly deceptive sky. You can't trust it. Recollect I recent splurge. Beautiful to look upon, behind it smiling exterior there lurks a devil and a millionimps which momentarily threaten our lives."

"Oh! Hum! Yah, yah!" said Pomp, skeptically.

"Of course—certainly—that is all," smiled Flush blandly and with a suave glance at the suspicious negro, he walked aft.

Pomp stood gazing after him a moment in silence.

Then he softly muttered:

"Fo'de Lawd youse mighty like dat sky y speak ob, sah! Might pay dis chile fo' to watch y Massa Flush."

And with his suspicions aroused, Pomp walked away.

On the following day the Greyhound passed over the Malgraves and had two-thirds of her ocean voyage completed.

It was a clear day, and a large steamship was sighted.

Frank resolved to go down and meet it to get water, as the store on board the Greyhound was fast diminishing.

Accordingly the air-ship was sunk to the sea and falling half a mile astern of the steamer, the propellers were put in motion, and he gave chase to the steamer.

The Greyhound was capable of going at four knots, but was under half that pressure, when Frank's surprise he saw the steamer flee from him as if to make its escape.

He keenly scanned the decks with a powerful glass, very much astonished at the actions of the in command of the vessel.

But presently he exclaimed in startled tones:

"There is trouble on board that steamer, and looks very much to me as if it might be a mutiny. At any rate I'm going to overhaul her and see."

CHAPTER XIV.

MUTINY ON THE STEAMSHIP.

ALL the rest on board the Greyhound approved of Frank's determination, he put on speed, and the wonderful vessel flew through the water in pursuit of the steamer.

She looked very much like a British trader, and carried no flag, burned soft coal, and seemed to be heavily freighted.

There was a wonderful amount of speed in her, but the marvelous velocity of the Greyhound so lessened the distance between them as the electric machinery began to work.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dr. Vaneyke enthusiastically, "she is a phenomenon, Frank—a veritable ocean greyhound, as well as a wonderful skyscraper. Never before has mortal vessel sped so swiftly through the brine."

"By gol," added Matt Mainbrace, giving a hit at his trousers and rolling his quid, as a look of intense admiration crossed his bearded face, "I be blowed if I ever seed anything like this afore—dash me ef I did. She's ther trimmest craft afloat by gol, an' I'm a lubber ef ever I'll clew in a bit canvas on a yard es long's I kin skim ther sea w ther b'llin' astern as high's wot we're a-havin' now."

On shot the Greyhound like a thing of life, far bearing down upon the fugitive steamer, along the taffrail of which a large crowd of men had gathered, looking astern.

Within quarter of an hour the air-ship shot alongside of the steamer, upon the stern of which the name of "Reindeer" was painted.

"Aho, there, Reindeer!" shouted Frank.

"Ship aho!" came a coarse reply.

"Haul to!" shouted Frank; "I want to board you."

"Go to blazes!" advised a tall, bearded individual, appearing with a revolver in his hand at the bulwark.

"What is the matter on board that craft?" demanded Frank.

"None o' yer business!" was the gruff, ungracious reply.

"I see weapons scattered about, wounded men lying in the gangways, and bound men crowded forward. Explain it, sir."

"Now ye'd jest best veer off on ther starboard tack," the bearded man exclaimed, with an ugly leer, "or by hokey we'll gi' ye a dose o' medicine s'll make yer sick!"

"That is a defiance, sir!"

"Jist what I mean by it, too!"

"Then if I find anything wrong going on look out!"

"Bout ship, now then! Mind—I warned ye in good season."

"I order you to haul to and show your colors."

"Werry good, stranger. An' here they is."

He waved his hand, a gangway port swung open and several men shoved out the muzzle of a forty-pound gun.

"Ah! A threat!" exclaimed Frank. "They are desperate!"

"Help, help!" shouted a smothered voice just then.

"Hulloa!" cried Frank.

"Save me! Mutiny and—oh!"

A cry of pain finished the sentence abruptly, and the voice ceased.

"That settles it," said Frank. "I suspected as much. We must tackle those fellows from above. They are evidently bound for some of the isles—few Caledonia, or perhaps Sydney. But to subdue them—then we can learn all."

He stopped the propellers and started the helms.

An effort, and up arose the Greyhound in the air, wringing a shout of amazement from all the men on board the steamer, who were eying her suspiciously.

Frank brought his vessel up until it hovered a few hundred feet above the deck of the Reindeer, when he kept her going along with the steamer.

They then had a good view of the deck of the vessel, and saw that there had been a sanguinary fight there.

Many wounded men laid about in various postures, there were smashed articles lying strewn round, broken doors and windows, and everything was in confusion.

The evidence of crime was obvious enough, and Frank cried:

"Pomp, bring out some hand grenades."

"Yah, yah," said the darky, foreseeing a fracas.

He did as he was ordered, and Frank left the wheel in Barney's hands, went to the rail, and shouted:

"Reindeer ahoy!"

"Wot d'yer want?" the bewhiskered man shouted.

"I want you all to go down in the forecabin."

"We dunno who yer are, or what yer are, but we won't!"

"Then I will drive you in!"

And so saying, he dropped one of the grenades down.

It struck the deck near the men and exploded. There ascended a chorus of wild yells, and Frank saw the men scatter and run across the deck.

Down went another grenade after them, bursting with a loud intonation on the deck, and one of the men dashed into the forecabin companion-way and down the stairs, as Frank had ordered them to do.

The men saw that he had them at a disadvantage, and feared for their lives if they disobeyed him.

It is true that several of the more courageous of them paused long enough to discharge their revolvers at the air-ship, but the bullets merely flattened harmlessly on the steel hull, creating no damage whatsoever.

Once they were all down in the forecabin, Frank lowered the Greyhound to the tops of the steamer's masts, and dropped a long rope ladder over the side.

"I'll go down upon her deck," said he to Harry Oward, "and open the cabin door, as I see it is unriccaded. If those fellows pitch into me, fire away at them."

Frank supplied the doctor, Matt, Pomp, Harry and Flush with repeating rifles, armed himself with a brace of revolvers and descended the rope ladder to the now deserted deck.

Near the mainmast he observed a fine-looking man lying on the deck intently watching all his movements.

"What is the matter on board here?" he asked a man.

"There has been a mutiny. I am the captain,"

said the man. "My crew revolted under the machinations of my rascally first mate. We were bound from San Francisco to Hong Kong, China, with a valuable cargo. Half my men joined in the enterprise to seize the steamer, run her to Australia, sell her and the cargo there and then disband. We resisted the plotters. Some of us were mortally wounded. The rest are locked up in the cabin. I have a bad wound and am bound hand and foot. They mean to kill us."

"Not if I can help it."

"God bless you, stranger. But what queer craft have you?"

"An air-ship. Here—I will cut your bonds."

He did so, and the alleged captain arose and picked up a pistol.

"I will liberate my men," said he. "You have driven the mutineers into the forecabin. I perceive. Lock the door while I free my men and the tables will be turned on the miscreants. They will return to port in captivity, and while some will go to jail for their villainy, the ringleaders will swing on the gallows at the end of a rope."

Frank's sympathy was aroused for this man.

"All right," said he. "Go ahead. If those fellows molest us, my friends up on the air-ship will fire down at them."

A gleam of triumph shone in the man's eyes, and he staggered toward the cabin—after while Frank hurried up forward to secure the door of the forecabin.

As he came near it, though, the men he had driven under shelter came scrambling out, and in a twinkling he found himself confronted by an array of rifles, every one of which was aimed at him.

He came to a sudden pause.

"So you've come down, hey?" asked the bearded man.

"Yes! Order your men to stack their arms."

"What for?"

"Look up and you will see."

"Ah! Your men hes got us covered, hey?"

"Six of you die the moment you attack me."

"What did yer le' that feller free fer?"

"To save his friends and capture the ship."

"Then you're a-helpin' him, hey?"

"Of course I am."

"By thunder! You'll pay fer it, then! Go fer him, boys!"

A hoarse cry came from the men, and while several of them rushed across the deck to intercept the man whom Frank had liberated, the rest rushed at the youth.

Bang! Bang! Bang! came a volley from above.

The sailors paused in dismay.

Frank flung up his hands, turned pale, and reeled back.

"By heavens!" he groaned, in agonized tones. "One of my friends has shot me instead of these villains!"

He clapped his hand to his head, and fell to the deck half stunned by a flying bullet.

As his glance arose, the first thing he saw was Jack Flush's face, and there was a diabolical grin upon it.

Then Frank's senses fled.

CHAPTER XV.

THE AERONAUT'S RAGE.

THE cruise of the Greyhound, in search for the mountain of gold, might have been brought to a climax very suddenly had Jack Flush's shot penetrated Frank's brain.

It was luckily but a furrow alongside of his head from the bullet that caused his senses to leave him, and when he came to consciousness again he was amazed to see the man he had set free a prisoner again.

Moreover Doctor Vanyke and Barney stood beside him, they having descended from the air-ship, and at the other side he saw a knot of the men grouped, who had been menacing him.

Staggering to his feet feverishly, he felt for his pistol, pointed at the men and cried eagerly:

"There they are! I'm glad you came to my aid. Drive the rascals down into the forecabin again!"

"Hold on, Frank," interposed the doctor, restraining him.

"Why, sir—can't you see?"

"Bedad," said Barney, "it's arl a mistake sure."

"Eh? Mistake? How?"

"These men are not the mutineers," said Vanyke.

"How mean you, doctor?"

"They are the loyal crew, and the rascal you liberated was the ringleader of the mutineers. He deceived you. The villains are all locked up in the cabin. He was just about to release them and renew the trouble when he was stopped in the nick of time. Isn't it so, sir?"

The fine-looking man nodded and smiled.

"I played upon your credulity," said he.

"Oh, oh!" said Frank, with a whistle.

"And I am the real captain," said the bearded man.

"Well! well! But you treated us so peculiarly and threatened us, and that led us to suspect you," said Frank.

"It is true, me lad. But we were excited. Not knowin' yer we steamed off, an' yer came toward us in sich a queer way an' in sich a singler wessel we thought yer might be a pirate, as we hearn tell about, which is cruisin' these waters in a strange lookin' craft."

"We have injured some of your men then?"

"Well, yer wasn't ter be blamed fer it."

"I'm sorry. You had your enemies subdued when we gave you pursuit, I see. Can we aid you any now?"

"Not a bit. We've saved ther ship."

"Then we will leave you."

Frank and the others mounted the ladder to the Greyhound after a desultory conversation with the gruff captain, and the electric ship sped away again through the air.

"It is singular," said Frank as the Reindeer was left hull down on the horizon astern, "that one of you should have taken the trouble to shoot at me."

"No, no," said the doctor. "We each picked our man, Frank, and if a flying bullet struck a bit of iron work it might have glanced off and wounded you. That is certainly the only way in which you could have been injured."

"Well, I suppose it must be as you say, doctor, for none of you would have any object in trying to kill me."

Jack Flush was the most concerned and most solicitous about the young inventor, and Frank said to him dryly:

"Do not be too anxious about me, Flush. Your face haunts me now. After I felt the bullet and fell I glanced up and saw your face peering down at me with the most devilish grin upon it I ever beheld. You may have done it."

"You wrong me, Mr. Reade," humbly said the man in injured tones. "I would have no motive in hurting you."

"Perhaps not. Yet the vivid impression of your face that I received was very disagreeable, I assure you."

Flush walked away, simulating an air of angry innocence, his heart boiling with rage over his non-success, and his fingers spread and clutched with intense nervous excitement.

That night the Greyhound passed over the Feejee and Friendly Islands, and on the following morning was going between the New Hebrides and New Caledonia.

If no accident occurred before the next morning, Frank calculated upon being over the water and above the Australian continent.

About noontime a most peculiar phenomena was witnessed by the mid-air voyagers.

Two dark storm clouds in the upper strata of air were violently driven together by contrary currents of wind.

They were both charged with positive electricity, and could not amalgamate into one mass, nor could they, in view of their affinity, discharge each other by a flash of lightning.

The highest storm cloud pushed the other down, or it might have been that the powerfully electro-negative earth intervened to attract the vapor charged with the positive element.

At all events, when the horn pulled from the under cloud, approached to within a few yards of the sea, the point became perfectly incandescent, and a stream of fire poured out of it in a tremendous torrent.

Beneath, the water became beautifully phosphorescent, and glowed with a bluish light long after the fiery cloud spent its energy and drifted away.

The lights of Heaven in the Great Bear call up others that decorate the Southern Cross, in the same way.

The Greyhound passed over the dangerous clouds, having been above them at the time, at least five thousand feet in the sixty-two miles thickness of the atmospheric envelope that surrounds the earth, giving a pressure of fifteen pounds to the square inch all over the surface of our bodies.

"That is one of the strangest things I ever witnessed!" exclaimed Frank.

"Have you ever seen a sand-storm?" asked the doctor. "They are a strange sight, caused by spiral columns of electric fluid passing from the atmosphere to the ground, with a forward, rotary, and spiral movement, from top to bottom. I determined their nature in India, once, by erecting a copper wire insulated upon a bamboo pole, led the wire in my room, and put it in communication with an electrometer with a golden plate, and a wire connected with the earth. In the progress of a sand-storm I saw the electric fluid pass from one

wire to the other in vivid sparks, with a crackling noise, powerfully affecting the electrometer. A fall of rain stopped it."

They stood on the forward deck while conversing, and Harry Howard was steering the air-ship, when just as the old scientist finished speaking, there sounded a crash down in the battery room, the door flew open, and out on deck rushed Barney and Pomp, pursued by Jack Flush.

The dark-faced stranger was in a fearful passion, his black eyes balefully glaring, the veins on his forehead swollen, and a malignant expression contorting his features.

In his hand he clutched his revolver, and as he rushed across the deck after the negro and the Irishman he aimed the weapon at the latter and fired a shot.

The ball whistled by Barney's ear in dangerous proximity.

"How's schuff!" shouted O'Shea, in alarm, "I'm murdered!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Frank, springing toward him.

"Faith, it wor only a bit av a practical joke, sor," gasped Barney. "Me an' Pomp towld him to turn wan av ther thumb-screws av ther accumulator jars, an' it gave him ther devil's own shock."

"I'll kill you for your cursed fooling with me!" the enraged man yelled, unable to subdue his anger.

He aimed the pistol at Barney's head point blank, and was just going to pull the trigger, when the Irishman dropped to the deck, and Frank struck the aeronaut a blow on the arm that knocked the pistol from his hand.

The blow was so powerfully dealt that it sent Flush's arm in toward his face, and Frank's fist struck the fellow a stinging punch on the nose.

A bellows of rage burst from his lips.

"What!" he cried, in frenzied, choking tones, "You—dare—strike—me! Oh, this is too much! Curse you! Curse you!"

He sprang at Frank with the savage ferocity of a tiger, and caught him up in his arms.

Rushing to the port railing and raising the young inventor high up over his head with almost supernatural strength, induced by the rage he was in, he yelled:

"I always avenge an injury! You shall perish!" A cold shiver pervaded all the transfixed and horrified onlookers, for they saw that the man had murder in his heart.

"I'll hurl you down to perdition!" hissed the half-maddened man. "I'll wipe out that blow with your life!"

And, drawing himself together, he drew back the sustained figure of Frank, summoned up all his strength and made an effort to hurl him from the air-ship far out and down, down into that black, yawning abyss below.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VILLAIN EXPOSED.

It is about 2,081 miles from San Francisco to Honolulu and from there to Sydney, Australia, about 3,980 miles more, and the Greyhound had nearly completed this great run of 6,061 miles under Frank Reade, Jr.'s direction, when he nearly lost his life.

Held aloft by the infuriated Jack Flush (who was Ralph Despard in disguise), the crazed aeronaut was about to fling him down from the deck of the air-ship into the void below.

And all on account of an accident wrought by the practical joke Pomp and Barney had played upon the villain.

Frank had no intention of striking the man in his face when he knocked the revolver from his hand with which he was menacing Barney's life; but he had done it, and that was quite enough for Jack Flush.

For an instant Frank's body trembled in the air over the desperate man's head, the young inventor so much amazed at this sudden, deadly onslaught that he was rendered powerless for an instant, and then the rascal swayed forward to launch Frank Reade, Jr., into eternity.

Every one of the spectators on deck were half paralyzed with horror and consternation, and could not move hand or foot to render Frank their assistance.

The young inventor himself then realized his peril.

But too late to save himself.

"I am lost!" he muttered.

Bang!

"Oh, God!" from Jack Flush in agonized tones.

Bang!

"I am shot!" from Flush again, and he staggered.

"Drop him! Drop him, or I'll put another bullet in your heart!"

It was May Blossom who spoke, and she stood in the door-way of the cabin aft, with a still smoking revolver clutched in her tiny hand, the weapon

with which she had so accurately shot at the angry man.

But her injunction was hardly needed, for the bullet was aimed true, and had lodged in Flush's body.

He tottered, dropped Frank to the deck, and fell.

In an instant the rest recovered from their stupor, and Frank bounded to his feet.

Jack Flush laid upon the deck groaning dismally, and they all ran over to the wretch, Doctor Vaneke bending over him to examine his wound.

"Stand back!" the man raved. "Don't touch me. Don't come near me! My foulest curses upon all of you!"

"May Blossom!" exclaimed Frank. "I owe you my life."

"It is lucky I'm a crack shot, and saw his intention in due season, sir, or you would have fallen lower and gone up higher than you are now," smiled the merry girl.

"What!" shouted Flush, painfully raising himself up on his arm. "You—you—May Blossom. You shot me? Oh! I did not dream that you were capable of it."

"You murderous fiend, I should have killed you."

"Blow my brains out now! It would be a pleasure to me to die at your fair hand. Kill me, I say!"

He tore open the neck of his shirt, exposing his bosom; but the girl turned away from him with a look of disgust and aversion delineated upon her pretty face, and said in low tones to Howard:

"Oh! how I abhor, fear, and distrust that man."

"You are nervous and trembling!" said Harry.

"It is the reaction. Lead me into the pilot house."

Harry did so, as he had been attending to the wheel, and neglected it to rush out to see what was occurring.

"He received but one of the bullets," said Dr. Vaneke, after a cursory examination, "but the wound in the side is not necessarily fatal. Yet it might confine him to bed."

"And a good place to keep him, in lieu of a prison," said Frank, "for he is a malignant scoundrel."

Flush came to a sudden realization of what he did, and it made him feel very uneasy.

To repair the damage as much as possible he held out a hand toward Frank, and cried contritely:

"Mr. Reade, for God's sake forgive me."

"Never!" emphatically replied Frank. "You've got a black heart, and a murderous bent of mind, Jack Flush."

"Consider," pleaded the wretch, beseechingly. "I was blinded with fury and lost control of myself."

"Hang ther gol durned swab!" interposed Mainbrace.

"You forgot that I command this craft," said Frank.

"I know, when too late, what a breach of discipline I made."

"And I had no intention of striking you in the face."

"True! I can realize it now. You only wished to disarm me."

"Had I not done so you might have committed a murder."

"Beyond doubt; but only in a mad frenzy, mind you."

"The men only played a harmless joke on you."

"Of course! I should not have lost my temper."

"It will serve you a lesson for future use. For my part I wish to have nothing further to do with you."

"Mr. Reade, I beseech you to—"

"No. Once my mind is framed I never alter it."

"Consider."

"Nothing! I will set you aground in Australia."

Jack Flush snapped his teeth together viciously, picked up his revolver from the deck, bounded to his feet—forgetting his wound—and aimed the pistol at Frank.

"Curse you!" he exclaimed. "If you are going to cheat me out of going on this trip I'll get even with you!"

He dropped a small packet of papers from his pocket as he arose, and Harry Howard picked them up and glanced at them.

The next instant he fired point blank at Frank.

The bullet struck the young inventor over the heart, but to Jack Flush's amazement the youth burst out laughing.

"Shoot again!" said Frank carelessly.

"I've missed you, I see. Then this one won't!"

He took deliberate aim once more and fired again.

The bullet struck close to the other, and Frank moved as if about to fall, when Jack Flush laughed outright.

"That settles you!" he hissed.

"Not at all. Fire again!" said Frank calmly, re-covering himself.

"By heavens! it is possible that you are uninjured?"

"Yes—I wear a vest of chain mail!"

"And I have not got a shot left in my pistol!"

"So much the better. Seize him, boys! We will throw the scoundrel off the ship down into the sea as he designed to do with me. That's no more than he deserves."

"No! No! Mercy!" yelled the shivering wretch falling down on his knees before Frank frantically, and holding up his clasped hands as Barney and Pomp seized him.

"I have no pity for you!" said Frank sternly. "I am remorseless. But I'll give you a fair trial. Dr. Vaneke shall be your judge, and Harry Howard can act as your defense. I will prosecute myself, and Barney, Pomp and Matt Mainbrace can act in the capacity of a jury."

The rest agreed to this, when Harry Howard exclaimed:

"Why, Frank, this fellow just dropped this package, and by all that is wonderful, they are the original maps and papers relating to the mountain of gold, stolen from you at Readestown, before we started on this voyage!"

Jack Flush turned deathly pale.

"Then he must be the thief!" exclaimed Frank. The rascal saw that the game was lost, and in his desperation he bounded forward, and cried recklessly:

"Ay! I did steal them! I am doomed, as I may as well confess. Put back the black beard on me, and who would I be?"

"Ralph Despard!" cried Harry, in terrified tones.

"Yes!" shouted the rascal, with a sardonic grin. "I am Ralph Despard! I am your hated enemy. May Heaven blast you all! I've fooled you, all along! Now do your worst! Kill me! Slaughter me! Torture me, if you like. I hate you! I hate you! Oh, how I hate you all! Now is the time for your vengeance—my time will come!"

He spit on the deck, and glared at them with blazing eyes, and a shudder convulsed them.

He looked like a demon suddenly broken loose from the infernal regions in the intensity of his diabolical rage.

Barney and Pomp had been shaken off, but they sprang at the infuriated man, and caught hold of him again with a vise-like grip.

It was a startling tableau.

May Blossom nearly fainted.

Then, like a flash, all the seeming innocence of this man's devilish actions in the past came to Frank's mind, and he realized what a viper he had been fostering.

"By heaven, he nearly stung and poisoned us," the young inventor commented. "But I'll pull out his venomous fangs!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FATE OF A RASCAL.

WHEN Ralph Despard was arraigned before Doctor Vaneke he was the incarnation of cool indifference.

"Frank," said the old scientist, "as you are going to give this wretched man an impartial trial, you can state your case in order to give Howard a chance to defend him."

"It is all easily summed up, sir," replied the young inventor, darting an angry glance at the sarcastically smiling rascal; "in the first place, he robbed me in Readestown, and if subsequent events go to prove anything, he is also guilty of having at various times tried to kill me and others."

"Cite an instance."

"He tried to stab May Blossom in his balloon."

"Well!" asked the doctor, as Frank paused.

"It is my opinion he greased his hands, so that I would slip from the ship at the time of the prairie fire."

"And he cut the rope I was climbing up," added Howard, "and begged me to keep it secret, saying it was an accident."

"You have both told the truth," confessed Despard, nodding.

"It is also my opinion that he was the cause of the Greyhound's flight from the California stock ranch, and the subsequent insensibility of all of your people."

"Ay!" exclaimed Despard. "I tried to steal the craft and drugged your whole infernal crowd."

"You see he convicts himself," said Frank.

"Shamelessly!" exclaimed the old professor.

"To cap the climax," interposed Ralph Despard, in defiant tones, "I'll give you another morsel for reflection. It was I who shot down at you from the deck of this craft while you was upon the Reindeer."

"Just as I imagined," exclaimed Frank.

"Moreover, I have just finished my work and failing in the attempt, I'm willing to take the consequence."

"And you shall have it!" said Frank emphatically, and he turned to Harry Howard and added: "You have heard the accusations. Even though you are his worst enemy, defend him impartially."

"Can you offer any grounds for your actions, Despard?" asked Harry, turning to the accused man.

"Three—love, hate and avarice," coolly replied Despard, with a nod. "I love May Blossom, hate you, and wanted to gain possession of this ship to find that mountain of gold and secure some of its great treasure."

"But that is no excuse for your crime."

"Oh, it is a mere farce for you to pretend to defend me."

"Then I reject your case."

"And to save further nonsense, I plead guilty."

"Remember," said Frank sternly, "you have a death penalty to pay, and all your bravado won't save you."

"Oh, I'm not afraid to die!" was the reckless reply.

"Found guilty then!" said Dr. Vaneyke gravely. "I leave your fate in the hands of the jury."

"What you say? Am we ter hang dat feiler?" asked Pomp in uneasy tones, as he glanced at the prisoner, and unconsciously felt of his own neck.

"Be jabbers, I'd rather shoot ther blaguard blindfolded," muttered Barney, who did not fancy becoming an executioner.

"Make ther gol durned swab walk ther plank!" said Matt Mainbrace, giving a hitch at his trousers.

"You do not understand," said the doctor, hastily.

"An intelligent jury to decide a man's fate," sneered Despard.

"You three retire to the cabin," continued the old scientist, ignoring the condemned man's remark, "and after you have come to a decision unanimously as to what we shall do to him, we will follow out your verdict."

That was more satisfactory to them, and when they were within the cabin, Barney jumped up on a table, and said:

"I'm after electin' meself prisidint av this maitin', an' I want ther two av yez ter do as I say in this maitner, or begob I'll break ther jawes av yez!"

"Belay thar, now," interposed Mainbrace, taking an enormous chew of navy plug. "This be fair an' s'quar, isn't it, messmates? 'Tisn't no one-sided gale o' wind?"

"Specs we're gwine ter gib him his life?" demanded Pomp, indignantly. "No, sah. Dis chile say cut him wif a razzar! Yo' heah dat? Ain't no yudder way 'bout it."

Barney spit on his hands and slapped his leg.

"Dhroy up!" said he. "Shure, an' it's moy o'iday ter plug him up wif dynamoite an' blow der spalpeen ter glory wid an electric whoire. D'yez moind?"

"Walkin' ther plank, by gol, is my plan," said Mainbrace.

Barney jumped down from the table and grabbed the sailor.

"I'll rassle yer fur it!" he exclaimed, bending a knee, and pressing it against the old sailor's stomach.

"Yo' done look heah, Barney!" exclaimed Pomp. "Dar's on'y one way, chile. We'se all got to ter 'gree 'bout dis—"

"Shut up, yer nagur! Ain't I prisidint av ther maitin'? It's me own o'iday, or none, bejabbers! Sehtand back, Pomp—sehtand back, I say. It's respect I has fer yer ould bones, but faith I'll pucker in ther gob if yer goes agin me in this maitner."

He dropped the sailor who ran out on deck, and grabbing Pomp by the shoulder and hip, he pushed him back to the wall, and slammed him against the partition.

This was more than the sable-hued jurymen cared to withstand, for he stooped, ducked his head, and suddenly butted Barney in the stomach, doubling him up and sending him reeling out on deck, groaning and clutching at his stomach.

Pomp and Mainbrace then solemnly marched back to Dr. Vaneyke, and announced that although the jury was unanimous in rendering the death verdict, they could not combine and come to a fixed conclusion as to the mode.

Frank readily comprehended how matters stood between the trio, and turning to the doctor, he said:

"There is one determination to be carried out, and that is to get rid of this murderous wretch. He has not killed any one yet, despite his violent attempts to do so. But he certainly would were he given volition. I therefore propose that we give him one chance to save his miserable life. We have all had that one chance, thanks to the protection of a merciful Providence."

"What do you propose to do, Frank?"

"Force him to jump from this ship into the sea."

Ralph Despard's countenance fell.

At first he imagined he was to be spared.

But now that hope was ruthlessly taken from him.

He must meet his doom, but there was a faint shadow of hope in the clemency Frank suggested. "But where is his chance for salvation?" asked the doctor.

"We can furnish him with a life preserver. He may survive; a passing ship may pick him up, or he may drift ashore. No matter how the case may be, he will at least have that one chance left to save his miserable carcass. Is it agreed?"

"Ay! That, then, shall be his sentence."

"Here, Barney!" exclaimed Frank.

The Irishman came limping up, shaking his fist at Pomp.

"Arrah, it ther belly-ache I have, sor," he groaned.

"You and Mainbrace lead this wretch to the starboard side. Pomp—you procure a life-preserver for him, and, doctor, if you will lower the ship a trifle, this beast will not break his neck, or die for the want of wind when he leaps from the ship."

May Blossom went inside while these orders were carried out, as the sight was too dreadful for her to witness.

Despard's courage forsook him at the crisis, and he whined and prayed, and yelled for mercy like a mad man.

But Frank was remorseless, and when Barney and Mainbrace had dragged him to the bulwark, Pomp thrust a life-preserver in his hand, and Frank drew out his own revolver.

Seeing that all hope was gone, Despard's mood changed.

"A million curses on you!" he yelled, his face livid, and his form trembling with excitement as he raised his clinched fist up over his head, shook it, and glared with fiery eyes upon Frank. "I curse you with my dying breath. I go to my fate. But I shall live; I shall avenge myself. The day will come when I will make you sweat blood for this crime. I call upon the powers of darkness to hear my oath! Seas and continents may separate us, but I shall track you down, and when we meet again may God have mercy on you, for I won't."

"Jump!" exclaimed Frank, leveling his pistol at him. "Jump, or I will fire and blow your brains out!"

The Greyhound had descended to within a hundred feet of the sea.

And with a parting curse lingering upon his swollen lips and a horrible look in his blood-shot eyes, Despard uttered a yell of terror, bounded up on the railing and sprang off.

Down to the sea hurled his body, and, striking the waves, it sunk like a shot.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE MERCY OF THE CYCLONE.

BEFORE dawn of the next day the eastern seaboard of the continent of Australia was discerned, and the aerial navigators beheld that vast extent of territory into the unknown heart of which they were to penetrate on their strange voyage in search of the mountain of gold which Matt Mainbrace had seen.

They were all up before daybreak, as they drew near to the rugged, mountainous coast at an elevation of fifteen hundred feet, and the Greyhound plunged on through the air toward an opening in the cliffs.

An arm of the sea ran in the dark, yawning mouth of the chasm, and as it seemed to run straight for some distance, Frank resolved to follow it.

The day was opening dark and gloomy, with intense heat, and the black rocks wore a sinister aspect.

The entrance was a prodigious ditch shut in between two walls of sharp pointed, perpendicular rocks of an average height of more than half a mile.

The waters were still and black, and a certain feeling of horror pervaded the navigators as they entered the rugged, beetling mouth of the gloomy canyon.

It seemed as if at every turn they might see legions of Satan's imps and witches start out of the uncanny nooks and ledges, for the awful sea-demon looked much like what the entrance to Hades must be.

There was a northeast wind blowing, and as it souched and moaned from cliff to crag the lone-some place became simply horrible.

Flocks of sea-birds, started from their nests in the mossy cliffs, arose with a great flapping of wings and the utterance of hoarse, unnatural cries as the air-ship approached.

"Great Heaven!" gasped Frank. "Such an abode of horror! Our entrance into this strange land is by its worst gate."

"Oh, golly! What's am dat?" gasped Pomp, pointing ahead.

Two-thirds of the distance to the top of the rocky wall a flash of lightning leaped out from the black rock, causing the voyagers all to start back with expressions of alarm.

Then a thousand fiery arrows of the fluid leaped forth from either side, expanding, then shrinking back again, and dispersing in luminous fringes before it reached the northern wall of the fearful defile.

The zig-zagging, broad tongues of flame advanced, whirling around and around as they came.

Rapid smothered thunder-claps began to resound on all sides.

They came with increasing power, before the live flames leaped from the rocks; then violent claps accompanied the lightning, reverberating with dull crashes along the narrow sea corridor.

It seemed as if two concealed batteries, on either side of the ravine, were bombarding each other furiously.

Frank and the rest glanced askance at each other.

Should they proceed along this infernal place, or rise above it, and navigate the circumambient air?

There came a strange answer—a fearful answer.

Thousands of vivid tongues of blazing lightning shot out all around the air-ship, enveloping its metallic hull in their crooked, forked tongues like a winding sheet.

It made the Greyhound fairly blaze, and then there came a terrible thunder-clap that nearly stunned them with the violence of its shock.

They were felled to the deck as if stricken a death blow.

Frank and May Blossom alone were insulated from the shock within the glass wheel house.

At first alarmed, their fears were presently dispelled, when they beheld their friends recover and arise to their feet.

"How sudden! It is fearful!" gasped the girl. "The electricity? Nothing in the world travels so quick," said Frank. "The rate is, perhaps, 200,000 miles a second. Here are examples: A projected cannon ball would take 21 hours to go around the world, a locomotive going full speed would take 17 days, and electricity would do it in less than half a second."

"Wonderful! Marvelous!"

"More astonishing; listen, Miss Blossom: The sun's light takes eight minutes to reach us; electricity at the same distance would occupy the same time, but a cannon ball would have to travel ten years to do it; sound would occupy fifteen years, a locomotive two hundred years, and a man two thousand years, never stopping night or day for rest or refreshment. You can therefore imagine that those electric flashes reached us before we fairly saw them."

While speaking, Frank raised the Greyhound up above the fearful canyon, and Dr. Vaneyke came in breathlessly, followed by the others, all excited.

"Horrible! Horrible!" he exclaimed. "I have only once seen a canyon similar to this in Norway; it was fearful!"

Those who had suffered the shock with the doctor were all bathed in a cold perspiration.

"Bejabbers," said Barney, solemnly, "Inver wor schreckn be loightnin' ontill terday, an' it's arl on account av us havin' ther curse av that blaguard, Ralph Despard, upon us."

The maledictions of the wretch yet rang in their ears, and they shuddered, for they realized how nearly it affected them.

Glancing down into the yawning gulf below them, they could see the lightning playing fiercely from rock to crag, and a sigh of relief swelled from their hearts to see that they were far out of its reach and no longer exposed to its fury.

The sun did not rise, but Frank managed to take a nautical reckoning, and calculated that a short run to the southward would bring them to Sydney, where he resolved to stop to make a few purchases before going inland to the mountain of gold.

Accordingly he communicated his intention to the rest, and the course of the air-ship was altered.

The lowering sky gave forth every promise of a frightful storm, and the young inventor made all precautions lest it overtake him, as he had been in Australia before, and knew what the storms there were.

"Just look at those clouds, as black as ink, piling up in the northeast!" he exclaimed to the doctor.

"It looks as if we were going to have a cyclone." "And you can depend upon its being a severe one, too, doctor. By Jove! do you feel that wind?"

"It seems to shake the Greyhound badly."

* The terrible ravine of the Lyse-Fjord, in which the above phenomenon is constantly occurring.—AUTHOR.

"And a mighty strong gale, too, in order to rattle this craft, sir. Listen how it is moaning among the helix uprights."

It was a dreary sound, and the Greyhound began to sway like a cradle, despite her ballasted keel.

"Can't we rise above it?" queried the doctor. "It can be done, but we might meet a worse blow above than down here. Better not risk it, I think."

"The wind is veering more around to the northward now."

"True, and but for the steadiness of the wheel, it would force us to make what might be termed aerial leeway, and drive us to sea again."

"It is with us now in a measure, though."

"Fortunately. We can make better time in consequence."

The others all abandoned the deck, and Frank and the old scientist were left alone in the pilot house.

It began to rain furiously.

The wind increased momentarily, sweeping the immense black storm clouds in rolling masses toward the Greyhound.

Frank had his hands full to hold the vessel on, and he noticed with uneasiness that they were edging to the coast.

"You will have to aid me to hold the wheel, doctor!" he exclaimed.

The doctor grasped the spokes with him, and they strained and tugged together to keep the air-ship on her course.

A few minutes later the storm burst just above them with terrific force, and the Greyhound was driven further to the eastward, amid the lightning flashes and thunderbolts.

The wind and rain were furious, and beat and swept the air-ship along like a cockleshell.

It was just as Frank and the doctor were exerting all their muscle on the wheel, that they heard a fearful crash.

The wheels spun around loosely of its own accord, and they both started back with horrified faces.

"What is it, Frank?" gasped the doctor.

"One of the rudder-lines has broken," panted the youth in dismayed tones. "We have lost control of the Greyhound. The storm is sweeping her out to sea again, and by heavens I fear we are lost!"

The doctor groaned, for he saw that Frank divined the truth.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TRIAL OF STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE.

The adventurers on the Greyhound had frequently been in dangers of a most harrowing kind, but never before exposed to such peril as that which now menaced them.

Swept along at the mercy of the cyclone, with one of the rudder-lines broken, so that it was a fearful hazard to attempt to repair it, the tempest was driving her toward the Pacific coast again.

Frank and the professor glanced at each other silently, and shuddered as they mentally speculated what their fate would be if they were blown out over the raging sea in the dim light of the gloomy morning.

The curses of Ralph Despard ere they forced him to spring into the sea at the pistol's point seemed to be finding foundation in fact.

At the outbreak of the storm all the remainder of the voyagers had sought shelter within the cabin, and knew nothing of the peril with which they were threatened.

Frank turned the matter over in his mind rapidly.

"We cannot ascend," he exclaimed presently, "for in the upper stratas of air we might increase our danger. To go down would perhaps be equally as disastrous, for if the ship happened to strike upon any of those jagged rocks it would dash her to fragments. And whirling along in this erratic manner is almost as bad as the other trouble."

"But what can we do?" asked Dr. Vaneyke.

"I must make an attempt to repair the damage."

"How can you do it? The rudder-lines pass out of two holes in the hull under the counter stern, and thence proceed to the outer edge of the rudder-blade where they were fastened on with patent ring bolts."

"True, doctor. But I must make the attempt or we are apt to perish. By lowering a line over the taffrail I can reach the rudder; and if this violent wind does not blow me off into eternity, I might reeve a temporary line by which we could regain control of the Greyhound until this storm wastes itself. It is worth a trial anyway."

"But the peril," remonstrated the doctor.

"I am accustomed to danger."

"Then I will aid you all I can."

It was useless to remain any longer in the pilot-house, so they staggered out on the oscillating

deck, and the fierce gusts of wind roared by, laden with a deluge of rain, and they crept over to the middle deck-house.

Procuring several strong manilla ropes from the storeroom, they made their way aft, and peered over.

The rudder was swinging to and fro, one of the wire lines intact, and the other broken a foot from the bolt.

So fierce was the wind that Frank and his friend were obliged to hold on to the railing for support, to prevent themselves being blown overboard.

It was evident that the only way to remedy the evil was to follow the plan suggested, despite the risk.

Accordingly, the rope was secured to the taffrail, and taking another in his hand, Frank climbed over the railing, and slid down to the rudder.

The wind oscillated his body as if it were a mere feather, and his grasp instinctively tightened upon the rope to prevent himself from falling.

He managed to reach the broken line, and getting the end of the rope which he carried, through the ring in the bolt, he made a large knot in the end to prevent it slipping out again, when the other end, which Dr. Vaneyke held, was pulled taut.

This had hardly been accomplished, however, when there came a shout of terror from the old scientist, and Frank felt the rope to which he clung violently jerked.

He glanced up and saw Doctor Vaneyke leaning over the railing clinging to it with desperate energy.

"What is the matter?" he shouted.

"The rope has parted," groaned the scientist.

"Parted?" echoed Frank, with a sudden thrill of horror.

"Chafing against this sharp edge of the railing it cut in two."

"Can you haul me up?"

"No! my strength is inadequate. I just caught hold of the rope as the strands were separating, else you would have fallen. What shall I do?"

"Can you hold it while I climb up?"

"My arms are nearly wrenched from their sockets now by the violence of your swinging in the wind, and I fear every movement may cause me to let you go."

"That is bad!" muttered Frank.

"Help! Help! Help!" hoarsely shouted the doctor.

But the mocking wind carried his voice away from the ship, instead of toward the cabin, and feeling that he was momentarily growing weaker, he continued his cries, with all the strength of his lungs.

No response came.

Frank's anxiety may be imagined, as he held on by one hand, and had one leg wrapped around the fragile line to which the professor was holding by one end.

To and fro swung the young inventor's body, his other hand clinging to the rope he had fastened to the ring-bolt on the rudder of the Greyhound.

The doctor had dropped the other end, and Frank kept hold to bring it up to the deck, else he could do nothing with the rudder.

The suspense was becoming unbearable.

No one heard their combined cries, and the doctor's arms were shaking as if palsied by the fearful strain.

"Frank, I can't hold on any longer!" he groaned.

"Do not give up, doctor. Brace up. Give me one chance to climb up. If we fail I'm gone."

"Then hurry," gasped the doctor. "I'm nearly dead!"

Frank had bound the new rudder-rope around his right arm securely, and, seeing that he might climb up the ten feet of space above where he could catch hold of the trellis-work, he commenced the ascent.

Groan after groan was emanating from the doctor's lips as he tenaciously hung on to the end of the rope, his face as pale as death, and his whole figure trembling.

Up went Frank quickly, perfectly calm and collected, his keen glance fastened intently upon Vaneyke as he calculated how long the doctor could hold out to save him.

"Frank!" shrieked the doctor, suddenly.

A cry pealed from the young inventor.

The doctor could hold on no longer.

The rope slipped—then it flew out of his hands. One horrified glance he cast over the railing just as the cabin door opened, and Barney emerged.

And he saw that Frank had not gained the trellis and was falling down toward the earth like a thunderbolt!

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSASSIN'S SHOT.

The man of science reeled back from the railing

with his hands wildly clutching at his forehead, a cold sweat bursting out all over him, and he groaned:

"My God! My God! He is killed!"

Barney glanced around, saw that something was the matter with the Greyhound, and observing the doctor's gestures of blank despair, he rushed up to him, asking:

"What's their matter, docther dear? Has anything happened?"

"We are at the mercy of the elements—the rudder is broken!"

"Och, an' it's dead we arl are, thin?"

"Pretty near it," groaned the old man. "Frank has been killed."

"Mother av Moses!" gasped Barney in dismay.

"Didn't you hear me shouting for help just now?"

"Me ears must abeen plugged wid wind, for it's not wan yell did I hear, sor. An' Masther Frank?"

"Went over the side on a rope to repair the damage, when it cut on the railing and down he fell."

"God rest his soul in pace. Shure he wor a good bye."

"A brave and excellent gentleman."

"So noble an' thrue," said Barney, with a sniff.

"Generous, smart and kind," groaned the professor.

"Such a handsome face and illigant figger."

"It is a sad loss—a fearful blow," said the doctor, mournfully shaking his head.

"Worra, worra," said Barney, blowing his nose, and real tears sprang to his eyes. "It's me heart's broke entirely, sir."

"See, there is where he went over, Barney."

They both shudderingly approached the railing and peered over the dreaded spot down into the void below.

Then they uttered a wild shout, bumped heads together, grabbed each other's hands, pump-handled, and seizing a rope from the deck, they made a slip noose on one end and cast it over.

For Frank was hanging below the Greyhound safe and sound, his grasp fastened to the rope he had knotted to the ring-bolt in the rudder, the end of which, being bound around his arm when he fell, saved his life.

He had been lustily shouting for aid, but the strong gale drove his voice away, as it had done the doctor's; but he saw them, and when the slip noose came down he put it around his body, and they hauled him up.

He carried the rudder line with him.

"I thought I was gone when I fell," he gasped, as he reached the deck, "but this rope explains it all to you."

"Thank Heaven you are alive!" said the doctor, fervently. "We were just extolling your merits and groaning over your loss. But you've cheated death again."

"I suppose you blackguarded me unmercifully?" said Frank.

"In the usual manner, when people die," laughed the professor.

"Well, my purpose is accomplished. Here, Barney, help me reeve this line through these running blocks that ran along the scuppers to the pilot-house, and within a few minutes we will have control of the Greyhound again."

They worked smartly, and having found that the new line did all that was expected of it, they soon sent the air-ship inland from the sea again, and traveled southward with the storm.

Within two hours the cyclone spent its fury by bolting ahead of the air-ship and dodging out to sea.

Then the noonday sun appeared, and all the dense clouds floating away, all nature beamed serenely again, just as if such things as cyclones were something entirely foreign to our mundane sphere.

"And there lies our destination—Sydney," said Frank.

He pointed over the rugged Australian landscape, for the eastern seaboard of New South Wales is very mountainous, and they beheld the city nestling down ahead of them.

The lighthouse on South Head cliff was plain to be seen, and a good view of the fortifications on George's, Middle and Bradley's Heads could be had as they drew nearer.

The city was large, two thirds surrounded by water, and was the oldest on the great island-continent.

It was just noon time when they had almost reached it, and began to descend directly in the heart of the city toward Hyde Park, in which Frank designed to land.

They saw that the squares were thronged with people, and the professor pointed down at the populace and observed:

"It looks to me as if there was some public demonstration going on down there, Frank. Should we land in their midst, the people will be vastly amazed at us."

"No doubt we will create a sensation. Oh, look! They see us now. Do you observe how everyone is looking and pointing upward? Ha! There they go!"

The Greyhound hovered like an enormous bird over the city awhile, then the helixes revolved slower, the great wings spread out, and she settled down.

The propellers stopped, the flanges came out, and they heard a hoarse roar of thousands of affrighted voices swelling up as the strange object came searing down from the sky.

Describing vast circles that narrowed as she descended, the graceful airship settled until, with a gentle shock, she touched the ground in the midst of the park, then the machinery stopped.

Within a minute she was surrounded by thousands of eager, excited and amazed people, and when the navigators made their appearance on deck, the cry of wonder that went up sounded like the muttering of a line of surf on the sea-shore.

Frank walked over to the railing and held up his hand.

An intense silence suddenly fell upon the multitude.

"To dispel your surprise," he exclaimed, "I wish to apprise you that we are human beings and that this vessel is merely a mechanical contrivance which I have the honor of inventing, and we have traveled here in it all the way from the United States."

A tremendous shout and exclamations of the most intense wonderment went up on all sides, and a fine-looking gentleman on horseback, surrounded by a body-guard of mounted soldiery in the British uniform, came through the crowd toward the ship.

He was the governor of New South Wales.

For an instant he paused, glancing at Frank, and as the youth saluted him, he acknowledged it and said:

"I cannot be mistaken in what I have heard. You must be that redoubtable young inventor, Frank Reade, Jr., who on other occasions has justly amazed the people in other sections of this continent. Am I right?"

"I have the pleasure of being the person you named, sir."

"And this strange machine?"

"Is simply an ærostat of a new model which I have recently invented, and in which I have come here from my native country to explore the interior of this continent."

"Wonderful! Extraordinary! And I being president of the branch of the Royal Geographical Society located in this part of Australia, beg to extend you and your friends the courtesy of the government house in which I dwell. It is located on the Fort Macquarie peninsula, between Farm and Sydney coves."

"And I shall have the honor of accepting your invitation, sir, on behalf of my friends and self, and thank you very much."

"It will afford me great pleasure, Mr. Reade, to assign you a guard for this wonderful flying machine as soon as you leave it to accept of my hospitality," said the governor.

"And we will have the honor of calling upon you this afternoon," said Frank, formally. "In the meantime, if the crowd is kept back at a respectful distance I would be obliged."

The governor stated that he would have it done and then rode away, when the voyagers, fatigued and glad to have a run on firm ground again, prepared to disembark.

Two coaches were sent to them by the courteous governor, and a guard of soldiery who roped the air-ship in a circle, and stationed sentries around it to keep the people away.

Going northward by Macquarie street which runs through the park to Parliament House, thence through the botanical gardens to the Government House, the adventurers were ushered in with as much stateliness and pomp as if they were royal guests.

Suites of apartments were assigned them, and when they assembled for dinner several members of the Royal Geographical Society were found at the board with the governor and his family, to all of whom Frank told his adventures.

Dr. Vaneyke then gave them some valuable information in regard to aerial wind-currents and electric phenomena, and in conclusion promised to furnish the society with all the geographical information he could glean in the progress of their voyage in the unknown interior.

There was a grand ball that night at the governor's house to which our friends were invited, Pomp, Barney and Matt Mainbrace being the only ones who declined to attend with Frank and the rest.

A week passed swiftly by, crowded with amusement and events, the hospitable governor insisting upon them remaining, and in the interim, Mainbrace, Barney and Pomp daily roved about the

city, executing Frank's wants and amusing themselves.

It was during the course of one of these peregrinations that the three, one afternoon, found themselves near Pyrmont bridge, on Darling's harbor docks, when they saw a familiar vessel come into a berth.

It was the Reindeer—the steamer upon which the mutiny occurred which they had participated in on the Pacific.

When she was moored to the dock, several of her crew came ashore, and were going past the trio of our friends, when Barney suddenly jumped forward and grasped one by the arm.

The man started, uttered an exclamation, and paused.

"Ralph Despard! Saved from the say!" gasped Barney.

"Ay!" exclaimed the startled balloonist, for it was he, and with a sudden wrench he tore himself free. "I am saved. Picked up, after my fatal leap from the Greyhound, I have been saved by this vessel—the Reindeer—upon which I have worked my passage hither. Go tell your master, and repeat to him my curses! And tell him that a protecting fate is watching over me. He and I will meet again, and when we do, he will perish like a dog!"

As he said this he rushed away, leaving Barney, Pomp and Mainbrace glancing askance at each other.

They hurried excitedly to the Government House, and told Frank of the circumstance, causing a grave look to flash over his face.

When they had gone out, the young inventor met the doctor.

"We must leave here at once," he exclaimed emphatically. "Ralph Despard was saved by the Reindeer, and the malignant wretch will not rest easy now until he works out some mischief for us."

The doctor was justly amazed, and after some talk with Frank, he went to apprise Howard and May Blossom.

That young couple had decided to get married that night.

When the doctor left Frank, he entered the governor's study, and told him that they proposed to start that night rather unexpectedly.

He was surprised, and remonstrated so forcibly that Frank lost his temper, and the conversation bade fair to actually end in a quarrel, when it was interrupted by the entrance of a servant.

The domestic had overheard part of the heated altercation, but did not know what caused it, and Frank left the room.

That night, just as the coach was awaiting, Frank, Vaneyke, Howard and the girl, who were to proceed to a minister in order that the young couple might get married, Barney, Pomp and Mainbrace having gone on board the Greyhound, Frank made his way to the governor's room to bid him good-bye.

As he was entering the room he heard a pistol shot, a wild cry of agony, and the sound of a heavy fall.

Fearing foul play he drew his own revolver, and rushed in.

The governor laid on his back in the middle of the room, and a broken window showed where an assassin's bullet had crashed through from the garden, striking the prostrated man.

Scarcely had Frank time to note the situation when a crowd rushed in from the hall behind him, foremost among whom was the servant who had interrupted the altercation with the governor that day.

One glance showed them the situation.

"The governor is dead!" shouted Frank. "He has been shot."

"And what are you doing in here with a pistol in your hand?" asked an officer.

"He is the murderer!" exclaimed the servant, excitedly. "To-day I heard him quarreling with the governor. Arrest him!"

The soldiers sprang forward to obey, when Frank darted back toward the window, leveled his pistol at them, and cried:

"Stand back! I deny the accusation! I am innocent! The first man who attempts to lay a hand on me will fall shot through the heart!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ELECTRIC GUN.

A SCENE of the most terrible excitement followed Frank's threat.

The crowd fell back with an angry roar of anger, more people began to rush to the scene from all parts of the building, the news was carried out to the streets like lightning, a huge multitude began to gather outside, and in an incredibly short space of time the excitement raged furious.

Frank saw that within a few moments the crowd would recover their courage, rush in and overwhelm him.

He would be shot down like a dog, perhaps, for a crime he did not commit, and his friends might have to suffer with him on suspicion of complicity.

To remain where he was bordered on sheer madness.

He glanced at the faces in the doorway, all convulsed with rage, and among them he saw those of the professor, Howard and the girl, all motioning him to run.

He saw that they would take care of themselves, and before the crowd divined his purpose, he dashed to the window containing the shattered glass and flung it open.

"It is useless," he thought, "utterly useless for me to try and vindicate myself. Circumstantial evidence is against me. I was heard to quarrel with him by that servant. When they entered they discovered me near his corpse, after the pistol shot, with my revolver clutched in my hand. I am condemned already. They would not believe in my innocence. They would hang me!"

He sprang upon the window-sill, and the spell that held the crowd was broken.

With a wild, hoarse yell they rushed into the room, and a dozen weapons were pointed at Frank. "Halt!" shouted a soldier—one of the household guard. "Halt, or we will shoot you down!"

A defiant cry from Frank was the only reply vouchsafed, and he sprang out into the garden just as a volley roared out, and a shower of bullets flew over his head.

He had hardly landed upon his feet in the dark, shadowy gardens unscathed, when out of the bushes rushed two soldiers with rifles in their hands.

Frank was startled at the sight.

He involuntarily paused.

"Up with your hands and surrender!" cried one of the men.

"Never! I am guiltless!" retorted Frank.

The other soldier advanced toward him, when Frank suddenly sprang at the man, caught him in his arms, and swung him around so that his struggling form was intervened between himself and the man's companion.

The other fellow had his rifle at his shoulder and pulled the trigger just as Frank screened himself.

"Bang! went the weapon ere the soldier saw what was done.

"Heavens! I am shot!" shrieked the man Frank held.

"Oh! What have I done?" gasped the other.

He turned deathly pale, reeled back, and ere he could recover his presence of mind, Frank hurled the shot man so violently against him, that they both fell to the ground together, and the young inventor escaped.

And just in time, for scarcely had he turned an angle of the building, when people began to jump out of the window he emerged from, and came rushing on in pursuit of him.

"Safe, thus far," he muttered, desperately. "And now to gain the coach that is awaiting us, and to reach the Greyhound. If I can do that, and the boys have the jars stored with electric power, I can escape. But—if not?"

He did not speculate long upon his chances to save his life from the infuriated people, but dashed ahead and reached the private entrance.

To his joy, he saw Harry Howard in the act of knocking the driver down, while the professor and May Blossom were hastily getting into the vehicle.

Up to them ran Frank in all haste just as the door of the government house was burst open and a crowd came rushing out on the balcony.

"Ha! here he is!" shouted Dr. Vaneyke.

"Get inside!" shouted Harry. "I'll drive you."

"No! It would expose the others to any chance shots they might fire at me. You get in. I'll drive."

The coachman was easily disposed of, and ere Harry could remonstrate Frank shoved him to the door of the coach and clambered up on the box.

"There they go!" shouted the guardsman.

"They are escaping in their carriage!" another cried.

"Shoot the Yankee rascals down!" cried another voice.

"After them—after them!" advised still another.

Frank gathered up the reins and whip, and sent the team off with a wild rush toward Hyde Park.

The crowd came rushing after the flying horses at full speed, their hoarse cries bringing fresh members to swell their ranks every moment from every direction, and shot after shot was fired after Frank.

He seemed to bear a charmed life, for not a bullet as much as grazed him during that wild ride for his life through the shadowy city.

His head was perfectly cool, but his mind was harassed by an ugly doubt that his friends might not have the Greyhound in readiness for instant flight, whereupon it would do him no practical

good, perhaps, to reach the air-ship, as escape would then be out of the question.

It was his only hope for salvation, though, yet the chances were against its being realized, as he had told Barney that they might not embark until late in the night in consequence of Harry and May wishing to be united by marriage before they returned to the Greyhound.

Of course the wedding was out of the question now, and the hunted fugitives fled on with a terrific pounding of hoofs, rattling of wheels and jangling of harness chains.

Several officers made futile efforts to check their mad career, and they soon reached the park.

Fortunately the four sentries did not yet know anything about the tragedy of the government house, and although surprised at the wild career of the carriage they made no comment, but helped the inmates to alight.

"You may go; we ascend now," said Frank.

"No!" hastily whispered the doctor. "Hold them as hostages."

"It would be a useless bother. I can manage without them."

"Very well. Oh—Frank! Look at the crowd coming."

Hundred of people were rushing through Macquarie street toward the park as the four sentries went away, and the inmates of the carriage hastened on the rope-ladder to the deck of the air-ship, where Barney and Pomp had inveigled Matt Mainbrace into a game of draw-poker, and were cheating him shamefully.

They jumped up when they saw our friends.

"Is there any electricity generated?" eagerly asked Frank.

"Not a bit, sor," was Barney's dismaying reply.

The others were horrified, for they would have to stay where they were for at least fifteen minutes exposed to the assaults of the multitude who must soon surround the air-ship, and with guns and small arms perhaps try to blow her to pieces!

Wasting no time uttering useless regrets though, Frank left the professor explaining to the three what had occurred, and then he dashed down into the battery-room.

He set the dynamo in operation, and then taking a key from his ring, he opened a closet of large dimensions in one wall, and withdrew a large, peculiar-looking machine working on a carriage with rollers.

It looked like a dozen polished steel pipes bunched, at one end secured to a mechanical contrivance of singular appearance.

It was an electric apparatus, and having withdrawn it from its hidden compartment, he pushed it along a tiny, narrow track set in the floor, to a square trap, and then connected it with two rubber insulated wires running directly from the dynamo.

Touching a button in the wall, an electric current put a series of balance weights in motion, and the trap on which his queer invention stood, arose, a perfect elevator.

By the same current a hatch on deck was swung back automatically, and the elevator lifted Frank and his odd invention up above the level of the deck.

The rest were amazed at his sudden appearance. "Why," exclaimed the doctor curiously, "what have you there?"

"This," said Frank grimly, "is what might be called a lightning-graph. In other words it is an electric gun, capable of projecting currents of lightning in separate volts, and with such speed that the burst of the volt and flash and report only occur after it traverses the air a certain distance. I can grade it so that I could burst a lightning bolt at the muzzle or at a distance of fifty thousand yards away."

"By heavens, Frank, this is a wonderful thing."

"It may prove so in modern warfare. You know I generate and chain up lightning in my accumulator jars to drive this air-ship. And now you know I can bottle it up in this gun, save the weight and trouble of powder and shot, and need no room except for my gun."

Just then the crowd drew close to the air-ship, and Frank sent all hands below where the hull of the Greyhound would protect them, and he fearlessly went to the railing.

A terrible cry arose when the crowd saw him, and he had the ship illuminated by signaling Pomp, and addressed the crowd with:

"Depart and leave me in peace. I am an innocent man!"

A wild howl of derision greeted this remark.

"Then if you remain," shouted Frank, when it subsided, "I will suffer no molestation. In an instant I could kill a hundred of you from this deck and none would know what did it."

Another shout from the mad crowd greeted him, and he saw a gang of officers dragging a large field gun through the crowd, which they trimmed to bear on the air-ship.

It was evident that they meant to blow the Greyhound and all her inmates out of existence.

A frown of annoyance crossed Frank's face.

"They force the issue—so be it!" he muttered.

He walked to his electric gun, trimmed it to bear upon the other gun and touched a press-button on the carriage.

Not a sound followed, but a vivid sheet of fire seemed to fly out of the muzzle of one of the barrels, and striking the breach of the gun managed by the men there sounded a frightful explosion, a terrible glare of fire and a thunderous cry of fear from the excited crowd.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BOOMERANG.

It seemed to the crowd of Australian officers who were managing the gun that a thunderbolt had struck it.

The blinding sheet of fire that whizzed from Frank's electric gun smashed the field-piece to fragments, and the flying particles of steel injured those of the crowd who stood in the immediate vicinity of the ordnance.

Hyde park had never before been the scene of such intense excitement, for there were thousands of people drawn to the spot by the report that Frank Reade, Jr., had murdered the Governor of Sydney.

A number of revolvers were pointed at Frank, but he sheltered himself behind the electric gun before they were discharged, and called out to Barney:

"Is there enough electricity stored yet?"

"No, sor," replied the Irishman from the wheel-house, where he stood watching the indicator.

"It is getting pretty hot out here, my boy."

"Dhroive thim back wid thier loikes as a shot or two."

"Yes, a good plan! I hate to do it, but for self-protection I must do something. We must gain time. Five minutes will be enough. Then we may ascend."

As he turned toward the gun again, he saw the crowd come rushing in toward the air-ship on all sides, the assault being so combined that they doubtless intended to gain a footing on the deck at a dozen different places.

Frank did not lose control of himself for a moment, but leveling the gun at the thickest of the crowd, he touched the press-button again, and there was another discharge.

Shower after shower of missiles came flying at Frank from the crowd on all sides, but beyond a few slight bruises he suffered no injury up to the time he discharged the gun.

A glaring streak of lightning darted out from the deck of the air-ship, and before the wild cries of the people whom it touched had died away he turned the gun around on a pivot and sent a dozen more shots off in different directions, each muzzle of the gun responding.

Those of the people whom that vivid tongue of fire touched fell as if stricken senseless by a powerful blow, and the cries of agony, fear and dismay that resounded on all sides were fearful to hear.

Like the surging of the ocean's surf the crowd fell back, every one panic-stricken at the havoc Frank created with his terrible engine of warfare.

They could not withstand the fiery lightning bolts projected into their midst and not exploding until they came in contact with the object of Frank's aim.

It was not likely he had killed any of them, for he had, by turning a thumb-screw, been enabled to graduate the force of the shots he fired in their midst so that they would suffer nothing more than the most powerful electric shocks when the volts touched them.

"Barney, how are the indicators now?" he shouted.

The Irishman did not reply for a moment.

Frank glanced toward the pilot-house and saw the old fellow pulling at the levers.

At the same juncture he beheld a regiment of soldiers at quick march coming into the park.

This alarming sight had hardly met his view when with a sudden whirr the helix spirals buzzed around on their axis, and suddenly imbued with life, the Greyhound sprang up into the air at the rate of a thousand feet a minute.

"Hurrah!" shouted Frank delightedly. "We are saved!"

A parting volley of missiles came flying up after the air-ship as she soared above the heads of the crowd, and as Frank glanced down over the railing a thrilling sight met his view.

A mounted guardsman came dashing into the midst of the throng, sending them flying right and left, and above the din of their vile cries he heard the soldier shout:

"Desist! desist! In Heaven's name, desist! Frank Reade, Jr., is an innocent man! We have captured the assassin who murdered the governor!"

"Thank Heaven I am vindicated!" muttered the very much astonished and delighted Frank.

He saw the crowd fall back abashed, and beheld them pointing up at the air-ship as it soared higher and higher every moment toward the clouds, their gestures calling him back, but he paid no heed to them.

Every one on the Greyhound but Barney, who was in the pilot-house, saw what was going on.

"You are exonerated, Frank," said Dr. Van-eyke.

"But I shall not go back now," said the youth.

"Of course not. They treated us brutally."

"Besides, we were losing time in our search for the mountain of gold. I guess they are sorry for what they did to us. At any rate, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I am no longer suspected of such base treachery as that of murdering the governor. Now, Barney, to the northwest, and mount no higher."

They had risen fully six thousand feet, and with plenty electricity stored away they shot ahead at the rate of one hundred miles an hour toward the interior.

An examination was made of Frank's wonderful electric gun which had done them such good service, and when its working was explained to them by the young inventor it was restored to the closet down-stairs.

Below them a wonderful expanse of territory was being passed, on their journey, the air-ship going over the great Blue Mountains and the tributaries of the Murray river, and by the dawn of the next day the Greyhound had passed over New South Wales into Queensland, and skimmed into the but partly explored central part of the island continent.

Two days went by, during which, deluded by the appearance of the McDonnell range of mountains, Frank was put on the false trail, and only found out his error after a long, useless search.

It was after that when Mount Freeling led him off on another false track, and when this discouragement was overcome they finally pursued Reynold's range to the northward, and came in sight of the lofty peak of Mount Steward.

They were in sight of their goal at last.

The country was poor, with hillocks, and fields of spinifex.

There were some nutmeg, ginger, banana and other plants, and a singular rock of conglomerate two miles long was met, with a spring of water in its center, at which they replenished their almost emptied casks ere going on to the mountain.

Different kinds of wombats, phalangiers, kangaroos and bandicoots were seen, but not a bushman was encountered until the air-ship settled down at the base of the mountain.

The Greyhound crashed into a dense mass of tangled scrub, covering many acres, when out from the thorny weeds started several men and boys.

There were a few evergreen trees near by, under which the barbarians had been operating one of their native rites.

It was the singular custom of removing two upper-jaw teeth, at a stated age of adolescence, from the mouths of the boys.

They were dirty, low people, wearing nothing but a cloak of matting, open at the right hand side, and fastened with skewers, while their headgear was simply bunches of feathers or tails of animals, and their bosoms and backs were tattooed and scored by rows of hideous raised scars.

These embellishments were produced by deep gashes at the age when youth becomes manhood, and the crowd scared up came from some bowers formed of branches of trees covered with grass and bark, in which they dwelt.

They were all armed with boomerangs, a peculiar curved blade of wood, so constructed and thrown that it swerves from its direct course, and returning, it hits any object in back of the thrower which he designs to injure.

Besides these they had hatchets of stone, and javelins pointed with bone, and at the solemn rite they had been feasting like vampires on the fat of the kidneys of a man from a neighboring tribe of enemies, slain in battle, for they are degraded cannibals, morally deficient, lazy, ignorant and brutal.

Every one came out on deck and saw them scatter.

Strong believers in witchcraft, the bushmen fled, and then prostrated themselves near the Greyhound, crying: "Buddai! Buddai!" they believing it was their sleeping god come to eat the whole world up.

"They imagine the ship is their deity," said the doctor.

"What revolting fellows!" gasped May Blossom.

"Just see what hovels they are dwelling in," said Frank.

"Don't know any better, by gol!" said Matt Mainbrace.

The *mia-mia's* (huts) were hardly fit abodes for swine.

A few moments afterward the natives crept shudderingly away in the scrub brush and disappeared, but within an hour they returned, followed by an army of fully a hundred, and standing upon a distant hillock they viewed the air-ship, when for the first time they saw the white men.

That aroused their suspicions, and a few moments afterward a shower of boomerangs came whistling through the air toward the people on the deck.

One of the hard wood sticks struck Pomp a violent blow that knocked him over, and his body striking against the shoulder of May Blossom, she was suddenly knocked from the deck over the railing down to the ground.

She uttered a shriek of dismay as she fell, and Harry darted forward to save her, but he was too late.

Pomp cried out with pain, and Frank was just in the act of lowering a rope-ladder over the side to go down to the girl's assistance, when the bushes beside her parted, and one of the blacks darted out and seized her.

In an instant he sprang into the bushes with the half-stunned girl and vanished.

Every one who saw it groaned with horror. "Save her, save her!" shouted Howard, frantically, as he rushed to the ladder. "They may kill and devour her."

"Stop! You are mad to venture down unarmed!" cried Frank, but the young man paid no heed.

With one bound he was off the ship, and he had hardly landed when he dashed in amid the thick bushes in pursuit of the native who had abducted the girl he loved.

"Madman!" muttered Frank, aghast. "They will destroy him!"

Then he suddenly shouted: "Barney, Pomp! Procure weapons quick! Dr. Vaneyke and Mainbrace remain to guard the ship! I will save them or never return alive!"

"Hurroo, fer a ruction!" cried Barney, as he and Pomp rushed out, armed to the teeth, and carrying Frank's weapons.

An instant afterward the three went over the side.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BLOOD-RED ROCK.

Into the bushes dashed Frank and his two friends in pursuit of the Australians, who left a well defined trail.

The tall, jungle-grass towered above their heads and was thick with nardoo berries and sharp thorns.

A series of wild, savage cries coming from ahead of Frank, apprised him that some trouble was occurring, and this suspicion was manifested when upon bursting into a clearing he saw Harry Howard struggling with several of the natives.

The blacks were yelling like fiends, danced around the plucky young American, and were making every effort to take him a prisoner.

Bang! Bang! went Frank's revolver, and as both shots wounded two of the blacks, it sent the whole pack rushing away, screaming with pain and fear.

"After them!" shouted Howard. "They have got May."

"Hold on!" cried Frank, as Howard started to run off in pursuit of his enemies. "It will do no good, Harry. They are better acquainted with traveling through this tangled brush than we are, and can easily double on us."

"Then what are we to do?" blankly asked Howard, coming to an unwilling pause. "Let them keep the girl and perhaps murder her? Never!"

"No! Emphatically no! Return to the Greyhound and we can hover over them soon enough, and thus stand a better chance to save the girl."

"But the villains are leading up the mountain."

"And so can we. It is an easy matter to see them by looking down from over their heads."

"Very well, Reade. I will abide by what you suggest," was Howard's reluctant answer, and he followed Frank, Barney and Pomp back to the Greyhound.

Once on board no time was lost in sending the vessel a dozen yards up in the air, the doctor navigating her, and all the rest crowded up in the bow with their weapons in readiness to keep a sharp lookout.

"We are going in the right direction to find the trail leading to the city of gold, too," said Frank.

"That's a beacon as we must take our bearin' by," said Matt Mainbrace, "an' that are the blood red rock which'll show us our course along the dried-up bed o' a stream o' water leadin' aloft on ther mountain ter ther second guidin' mark. Then's when our troubles'll begin."

"Our troubles?" questioned Frank.

"Ay, ay, sir. We'll be in a section wot's thick

with dwarfs—leestle bits o' fellers as ugly as sin an' twice as nasty. They range all about a big rock in ther shape o' a man's head. At that rock thar's a pass over a chasm, an' that's ther only spot whar it kin be crossed afoot."

"How is that?"

"It's a natural stone bridge."

"But how about flying over the chasm?"

"I hopes as it kin be done, sir."

"And why shouldn't we?"

"Well, I've hearn tell o' ther horrors o' hell, but if that ere chasm ain't wuss I'm no jedge. Ther roarin' fire what's a-comin' aloft from that ere pit is awful—a terrible blaze allers a-shootin' skyward, an' ther heat so powerful yer can't git nowhere near it 'ceptin' by goin' over that bridge I mentioned afore."

"And once we do get over."

"It's jist as bad, by gol, for we'll be in a sort o' island kivered w' rock an' little vegetation, an' it's peopled by a band o' giants wot guards that buried city. If we manage ter git ther best o' them we'll have to pass through a den o' wild beasts ter git in ther city o' gold."

"The obstacles are greater than I imagined."

"Ay, sir, but the paymint'll be jist as great."

"Ha! What is that?" exclaimed Howard.

He pointed ahead excitedly, and they saw that the tall grass was violently agitated by some moving bodies within it, which certainly must have been the blacks.

"We are close on to them now," said Frank.

They were at the bottom of the mountain, and were ascending a rugged slope that was leading them toward a vast mass of outcropping rocks.

It was a wild, desolate place, and they saw several frightened kangaroos dash away into the seclusion of a growth of timber, by taking great leaps in the air, every bound carrying them a dozen feet and more.

On fled the Greyhound, when, with a sibilant hiss, a number of javelins shot up from amid the tall grass toward her, the flinty points striking the hull, breaking, and the shattered shafts falling to earth again uselessly.

"Fools!" muttered Frank. "They imagine they can injure us. But the thin steel of our hull could withstand a volley of rifle bullets! Give them a shot, Harry."

"With pleasure! Ah—look at that fellow!"

It was an ugly-looking wretch who was just in the act of hurling a boomerang that Harry singled out down in the grass; then he fired at him.

There came a wild howl of dismay from the man as the bullet struck him, and as he flung up his arms and fell to the earth Harry remarked:

"He was the fellow who stole May Blossom. But some one must have taken her from him. He tried to hit me with his boomerang awhile ago."

The air-ship passed over him, and a moment later was above the others, but they saw no sign of the girl in their midst, even by the aid of a telescope.

"I'll find out what has become of her," said Frank, as he shouted to the doctor to slacken speed.

He picked up a rope, made a noose in the end, and as they went along after the frightened and running blacks, he singled out the most convenient man, and awaiting his opportunity, he dropped the noose down so adroitly that it fell over his shoulders.

A sudden jerk at the lasso, and the black was thrown over, then hauled up, screaming at the top of his lungs with fear.

For a moment he swung beneath the Greyhound like the pendulum of a clock, and then Pomp and Barney hauled him up on deck.

They did not unbind him, but wrapping the lasso around his body he was secured so he could not move.

Barney ran in to relieve the doctor, and when the old scientist came out on deck he questioned the negro in an Australian dialect as to what became of May.

The frightened black did not understand him, and for the very good reason that there are hundreds of dialects among the natives, some tribes living within a few miles of others not being able to understand a single word of each other's language, strange as it may seem.

A symbolical form of questioning was then resorted to, and after much labor they managed to elicit the dismaying information that runners had been sent on ahead with the girl up the mountain to a tribe of dwarfs that dwelt there.

They then tried to ascertain what was to be done with the girl, but the man stubbornly refused to reveal their plans.

Seeing that no further information could be gained from him, he was locked up in an empty state-room.

"We can only keep on as we are going," said Frank, "and make an effort to find the dwarfs to rescue her."

"By gol!" exclaimed Matt Mainbrace excitedly.

"I see through it now! They are agoin' ter take her up ter ther fiery chasm, 'cause that's whar them dwarfs are."

"Why do you think so?" queried Frank.

"Lor' bless ye, lad, looker thar! That's whar tells me."

He pointed ahead, and cries of wonder burst from the rest as they glanced ahead and saw what he pointed at.

"The blood-red rock!" cried Frank.

"Ay, ay, sir!—the one mentioned in that ere old manuscript."

"Then his story is finding foundation in proof," said the doctor gravely, "and the treasure must be no myth."

The rock was a square wall, one hundred feet in height, standing all alone amid the bowlders, and the sun was shining directly and fully upon it from the south.

"But that strange crimson color?" said Frank. "It seems to move."

"My dear boy," said the professor with a smile, "it glistens too, don't it? Well, the color you see is simply formed by millions of ants that swarm over that rock and dwell in it, and it is the sun's rays slanting upon their bodies you see."

The Greyhound passed it and then went up the mountain, over the bed of a dried river, on her errand of mercy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DWARF'S CATAPULT.

A wild piercing shriek of terror in the voice of a female pealed out on the clear mid-day air of the great mountain.

It was a cry fraught with the most intense anguish, and it sent a chill of horror to the hearts of the anxious listeners on the deck of the air-ship.

They were going through dense forests, over streams and through fearful jungles, the great peak of the mountain towering up thousands upon thousands of feet above them, its cap protruding through the clouds.

Everything at a certain height had begun to change from the beautiful verdure and fragrant flowers to a gnarled, rough and barren rocky aspect.

The Greyhound had gone into a dark and forbidding looking gorge, when that appalling shriek was borne on the mournful breeze to the ears of the navigators, who were watching so anxiously on deck.

"Put on more power, Barney!" shouted Frank.

"It was the voice of May," groaned Howard.

"And it came from ahead," added the doctor.

Along shot the Greyhound at redoubled speed as Barney pulled the lever out, and a few moments later the air-ship dashed from the gorge into a huge circular basin, a mile in diameter, with towering cliff-like walls arising all around its flat bed.

Within this place they saw nearly a thousand men.

But such creatures!

Not one of the ugly little wretches was over four feet in height, their pigmy bodies wrapped in matting, and every one of them armed with weapons similar to those carried by the natives.

In their midst were two ordinary sized men and the whole crowd, bearing a burden of some kind in their midst, were rushing toward an acclivity that led up to the top of the cliffs surrounding the basin.

"This place looks as if it was the crater of an extinct volcano," observed the doctor, and there are the dwarfs whom our prisoner mentioned. What can the matter be? See, there are two tall men among them, and they are bearing something away as if exceedingly excited."

"Perhaps it is May," said Howard anxiously.

"The cry we heard came from here," added Frank, who had called to Barney to steer for the dwarfs, "and those two men may be the runners who carried the girl up here. Ha! there they go up the hill."

"Blast 'em," said Matt Mainbrace, "they see us."

"Ay," added Frank, "and are hastening. But I say, Matt, as you were here before, do you know anything of this place?"

"I do, sir. They are aeverin' off ter ther stone bridge as crosses ther fiery chasm. Yer ha' ter cross this ere place ter reach it an' them cooves seems as if about ter tack across ter starboard. Better overhaul 'em, sir."

The atmosphere below had been boiling hot, and as they ascended the mountain into the rarer air they expected it would become cooler; but such was not the case.

On the contrary, it seemed to be hotter where they were than it had been at the base of the mountain.

But if there was a lurking volcanic crater in activity near by, the heat was not to be wondered at.

The Greyhound dashed ahead, and rising in the

air the navigators suddenly were brought into view of a sight that almost froze the blood in their veins.

It was May Blossom in the midst of that horde of dwarfs, and the girl was threatened by a terrible fate.

At the crest of the cliffs there was a vast opening in the ground, from which ever and anon great gusts of sulphuric smoke were blown skyward, to be followed by sudden bursts of vivid flames.

The great fiery tongues flared up for an instant, then sank down out of sight again, only to reappear as soon as the next burst of gaseous smoke came.

The edges of the yawning chasm had a dry, baked look, and a vast line of dancing heat could be seen playing above the enormous pit, to mark the immeasurable amount of torrid air above the crater.

The chasm ran in a circle, and across it a wide, natural bridge of solid stone joined both sides of the abyss by a link which even the fire could not overcome.

In the middle of this bridge the dwarfs had come to a pause with the girl, who had begun to scream again, and those upon the Greyhound saw that they were drawing down the branch of a thick sapling of palm, it requiring fully fifty of them to hold the springy pole bent.

Frank's face turned pale.

"By jingo!" he gasped, "they are going to use that sapling as a catapult to hurl the bound girl far out into that volcano's crater! Can't you see that they have bent the sapling over, and are loosely fastening her body to it? The moment they let it go it will spring back into its natural position and hurl the girl up into the air, where she will describe a parabola, and then fall into the crater."

"Great Heaven!" groaned Howard, wringing his hands in anguish; "can't we reach her in time to save her?"

"Perhaps. I hope so, at least."

Barney had seen what was transpiring, and pulled the propeller lever out, sending the air-ship ahead faster.

"The crowd is scattering—they are most ready," said the doctor.

"Oh! This is horrible!" moaned Harry, in agony.

"We can't reach them on time," said Frank.

"Don't say that, Reade. Oh! don't say that!"

"But it is the truth. Before we could reach them they will launch her into eternity."

"Can nothing be done?"

"There is one last, desperate resort."

"And that?"

"The electric gun."

"Try it."

"Then wait a moment."

Frank dashed down-stairs, and had the gun up on deck in a twinkling, connected with his dynamo.

He glanced keenly at the fiendish dwarfs, and saw that they had fastened the sapling end down to a rock, and were placing the girl's figure upon the trunk where it forked at the juncture of the branches.

A man stood by with a knife in his hand to cut the thong that held the sapling to the rock.

This would release it, and the girl would be shot up into the air to descend in the fiery crater.

Frank had hardly turned the piece to bear on the dwarfs when they all scattered, exposing the prostrate figure of the bound girl secured to the sapling.

The dwarf with the knife sprang toward her to cut the lashings, and Howard, overcome with horror, fell fainting to the deck of the Greyhound.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

The position in which May Blossom found herself was perilous in the extreme, for the knife wielded by the dwarf Australian was at the thong which held the bent sapling to the rock, and the moment he cut it her life would pay the forfeit.

The rest of the band of dwarfs had rushed aside on the natural stone bridge crossing the fiery chasm, and the Greyhound was dashing toward them at full speed.

Proned upon the deck lay Harry Howard, insensible from the strain brought to bear upon his overwrought nerves, and Frank aimed the electric gun to bear upon the dwarf who was about to put a period to May Blossom's life.

There was an anxious look upon Dr. Vaneyke's face, and the old sailor became so intensely excited that he grasped Pomp's arm in such a powerful clutch the darky fairly writhed in pain.

Aiding the young inventor as much as he could by the skillful management of the air-ship, Barney kept the vessel as steady as a rock on her course.

"Watch that chap with the knife, doctor," said Frank, as he sighted the gun. "Poor wretch, he little suspects how that steel blade will draw the lightning!"

Whiz! went the gun even as he was speaking.

The lightning bolt had no sooner been released from the gun when it struck the knife, glanced up the dwarf's arm to his head, there was a vivid flash, an explosion, and stricken dead upon the spot, the man fell over.

A shout of horror and amazement pealed from the rest upon beholding his fate, but so determined were the dwarfs to carry out their purpose, that no sooner had the little scoundrel fallen when another sprang forward, armed with a stone hatchet to sever the rush thong.

Whiz! went a second barrel of the electric gun. Once more a flash at the man's head, a violent concussion, and a second dwarf was instantly killed.

The girl as yet remained unharmed.

"It works like a charm," said Frank grimly.

"Drive them back with a volley," said the old scientist.

Frank then touched the press button on the breech of the gun again and again, the barrels revolving and every bolt dealing destruction in the midst of the flying dwarfs.

The blacks realizing that death stared them in the face in an awful form if they remained there any longer, took to their heels and fled across the bridge, leaving the girl lying where she was.

Within a few moments the air-ship hovered above her, a ladder went over the side, Frank descended, and cutting her bonds, he lifted her up from the unbreachable hot rock.

She was unconscious.

A wild chorus of cries from the dwarfs assailed his ears, and hastily glancing over his shoulder, he was surprised to see them come rushing back toward him.

It was evident that they were furious to see him saving the girl; and braving the witchcraft as they thought the air-ship was, they meant to thwart Frank.

He made a dash for the rope ladder, hoping that the doctor would fire a few shots at them from the gun; but the old scientist, not understanding the mechanism, in his endeavor to hastily do so, disarranged some of the complex wires and rendered the gun useless.

Upon seeing how he bungled the matter, he called upon the others to pour down a fire on the dwarfs from their rifles.

This was done just as the pigmies were closing in on Frank, who was totally unarmed save for a revolver in his hip pocket, and several of their numbers fell killed and wounded, yet it did not deter the determined little wretches from keeping on toward Frank.

The doctor came down the ladder to Frank's aid and took the girl from his arms, when the air-ship moving forward a few yards, the dwarfs crowded between the ladder and Frank, and the doctor had to ascend with the girl to the ship, as he was rendered powerless to help Frank, encumbered as he was by the dead weight of the senseless girl.

Left alone, Frank was surrounded by the dwarfs, and the people on the ship above dared not fire at those nearest to him, for fear of hitting him by accident.

Hundreds of them assailed the youth in a body, the stunted little rascals screaming in shrill tones; and attacking him from all sides, they climbed up on his body, and sought by every means to get him down on the ground.

Some tried to pull his legs from under him, others tried to trip him, a few tried unitedly to push him over, and several of them savagely thrust their javelins at him.

But Frank found himself equal to a score of them.

He caught one of the persistent little blacks by his thin legs, and using him as a club, he knocked several down and fought his way out of the circle.

Then he flung the little rascal over the chasm, and tore those from his person who had climbed up on him, much as one would brush away some obnoxious pests, throwing them at the rest with telling effect, and made an effort to reach the ladder to gain the air-ship again.

He did not remember having the revolver in his pocket.

"Confound them!" he gasped. "How they stick! What fiendish tempers! Their weapons hurt like sixty. They will get the best of me if I let them, and they might kill me outright!"

As he spoke a javelin whizzed at his breast and struck him, but fortunately he had on his vest of chain-mail, and the sharp, barbed point did him no harm.

No sooner had he shaken off the first lot of the midgets, though, when others took their places, and it became harder and more harassing than ever to reach the dragging ladder.

"If Barney would only come down!" he muttered.

Crack! came a violent blow on the back of Frank's head just then from a boomerang, making him see stars.

He staggered for a moment and fell on his knees

half stunned, when with a yell of fiendish delight a dozen of the stunted little vagabonds fell upon him in a body, knocked him over upon the broad of his back and bound him hand and foot.

Shot after shot had been coming down in the midst of the dwarfs from those upon the Greyhound, and they returned the fire with showers of missiles, many of which fell upon the deck of the drifting air-ship.

But the moment Frank was captured they scattered, three quarters of them dashing ahead across the bridge and the remainder crowding so closely about Frank that they were not shot at.

The ones who crossed the bridge vanished among the rocks on the other side and those holding Frank carried him over, the air-ship following them like a shadow.

In the hands of his insignificant-looking enemies Frank could not move hand or foot, and was forced to quietly submit to being conveyed whithersoever they pleased to take him, yet he did not entertain the least fear.

"The worst they can do is to kill me, and I have no fear but that my friends will first make an effort to save me," he muttered.

Faster moved the dark-skinned crowd, and they soon reached the other side of the bridge, an occasional shot coming down from the air-ship, dropping a man on the way, and eliciting a wild howl of fury from the rest.

It was a singular place to which Frank was being carried, and the glances he cast around showed him a dearth of vegetation, a vast area of rugged rocks and a large tract of coarse red sand stretching off at one side.

The air-ship followed after the dwarfs, and they went in among the rocks presently and came to the ruins of a massive wall of masonry, at one side of which Frank saw an enormous rock, rising fully fifty feet from the earth, crudely carved into the shape of a man's head.

"The entrance to the buried city of gold!" he muttered, in amazement. "More proof of the truth of Matt Mainbrace's story. It must indeed be no fable conjured up by a fevered imagination. Seeing the reality, though, will clinch all doubts."

A grim skeleton of a barbarous race hidden in this wild place from the eyes of civilization for ages, this grotesque statue stood a living witness of some man's wonderful ingenuity.

The dwarfs had hardly passed the opening in the wall when the Greyhound suddenly swept down toward the earth.

At the same juncture a band of giant blacks between six and seven feet in height suddenly appeared before the dwarfs.

Their ranks parted and a white man appeared from their midst.

Frank looked up at him.

An exclamation of amazement burst from his lips.

"Ralph Despard!" he cried, hardly able to accredit his senses.

"At your service, and master of the situation!" said the ex-balloonist, for he it was, and he smiled like a demon.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

ALTHOUGH Ralph Despard had lost the package of papers he had stolen from Frank Reade, Jr., he had read them through so frequently that their contents were indelibly committed to his memory.

Losing no time in Sydney, for he had robbed every one on the Reindeer, he purchased a good horse and equipments, and set out with dispatch for middle Australia.

Having a week's start of Frank, he had improved his time so well under the guidance of a hired bushman, that he reached the mountain of gold and penetrated as far as Frank had found him.

Enlisting the friendship of the giants by apprising them of Frank's coming to wrest their treasure from them, he promised to save their hidden city from the invader, arguing to himself that he could thereby thwart Frank and have a most excellent opportunity of gaining some of the gold himself.

Consequently it may be inferred that the blacks hated and feared Frank, and were doubly zealous to kill him in order to protect their wonderful treasure.

"You seem to be very friendly with these blacks," said Frank.

"And I am," replied Despard. "I am leagued with them to exterminate you. In fact, I have proved my allegiance by joining their tribe. Look at the cavities of my two upper jaw teeth which they have extracted. That is one of their most solemn rites. It makes me their brother, I am a Papuan now."

"Then I have fallen among the Philistines."

"Yes. You come like David to slay Goliath, but the giant will kill you instead. You are my prisoner!"

Just then a dark shadow over Despard's head caused him to hastily glance up, and he saw the air-ship settling down upon his and the giants heads.

With cries of affright they all started back and ran in among the rocks, dragging Frank with them.

The Greyhound struck the ground, the helices stopped whirling, and Dr. Vaneyke with the others opened fire upon those of the blacks whom they could see.

Several of the giants fell.

"This must cease. We must capture the air-ship," hissed Despard to Frank, who lay on the ground near him.

"You cannot do it. My friends will save me," replied Frank.

"Bah! nothing is impossible. Murrumbidgee, the chief of this gang of giants, is a great man and fears you. They will fight like rats in a trap, because they know what you have come here for, and are very jealous of their treasure. I will impart a plan to him whereby we can capture your friends and pull out their fangs. Here is Calewatta, my guide and translator. I say, Calewatta, come here. I want you to talk to the chief for me."

"Well," said the dark-skinned native approaching, "what do you want?"

"Tell the chief to cause a cross to be made of saplings. We will fasten this man to it, hold him in front of us and approach the air-ship. The man there will not dare to fire at us then, for fear of hitting this fellow. By that means we can get near enough to the vessel to make a dash and capture the ship. Do you understand?"

"I do," said Calewatta. "I will tell Murrumbidgee."

He hurried away, and Frank exclaimed:

"You are a good general, Despard, but you won't succeed."

"It is worth a trial, anyway."

"Of course. Nothing venture, nothing gain, you know."

The chief approached with several of his men, and Despard's plan was carried out to the letter. Then all the blacks were marshaled in a body.

Frank was secured to a cross and was carried on ahead.

All the blacks were enraged at the havoc created in their midst by Frank's friends' rifles, and were eager to attack the adventurers in the manner Despard proposed.

The dismay of those upon the Greyhound may be imagined when they saw that body of giants moving toward them with Frank's body held up in front of them as a shield, and Ralph Despard in the lead with Chief Murrumbidgee.

The dwarfs had all gone away, back over the bridge, to seek the lower grounds of the mountain again, since their services were no longer needed.

"Fire at them with the gun!" shouted Frank, wrathfully, as the crowd drew in gunshot of the air-ship. "Never mind if you hit me. If you don't, you are lost."

"We can't—we don't understand it!" replied the professor.

"Pull the lever out at the side, and touch the press-button."

"The lever? Ah! I did not notice it."

"Hurry! Hurry!"

"Shut up!" growled Despard, savagely.

"No I won't!" retorted Frank, hotly. "I'm bound, but not helpless."

"Shut up!" yelled the man again, "or I'll make you!"

He raised his clenched fist, and struck Frank a violent blow on the mouth that drew blood.

It was a cowardly blow, and it made Frank turn pale.

"Oh, you cur!" he exclaimed.

"I'll hit you again if you don't bridle your tongue," was the brutal reply, and Despard raised his fist once more.

"You wouldn't do that if I was not bound!" hissed Frank.

"No; I know I wouldn't," said Despard, with a grin. "But you can't retaliate now. I've got you at my mercy, you see!"

While this dialogue was transpiring, the blacks kept advancing toward the air-ship in a solid body and Barney, Pomp, Mainbrace and Howard (who had recovered from his fainting fit) stood at the railing firing at them with their rifles every chance they got.

The doctor had gone to the electric gun, and after a short examination of it, he found the means of operating the piece so that it would work properly.

Despard was sure of an easy victory.

"Once the blacks capture the Greyhound," he thought, "I will have a means of leaving this infernal place with an enormous fortune, while the bones of those adventurers will bleach in the sun of this desolate region."

The blacks had gained a dozen yards of the air-ship, when suddenly the old man of science pressed the button on the breach and a lightning bolt shot from the gun and exploded in the midst of the giants with a loud intonation that struck terror to their hearts.

Again and again the gun belched its fire-balls, and these were supplemented by a number of hand grenades, flung by the others, that burst with the roar of artillery.

Despard turned pale with fear and chagrin.

"What—is—that?" he stammered, coming to a pause.

Frank laughed outright at him.

"I told you that you could not capture the ship," he exclaimed. "They are firing lightning bolts at you. If one of them so much as touches you, Despard, you are a dead man! Now advance if you dare!"

A cold sweat burst out all over the rascal, and he saw the giants pause and look as if about to seek safety in flight, for they had not the moral courage to withstand this sort of terrible warfare, as brave as they were.

"Calewatta!" shouted Despard excitedly. "Tell Murrumbidgee to retreat."

"You have lost the fight!" cried Frank exultantly.

"But your life, curse you, shall pay the forfeit. I will cause you to be flung into a den of wild beasts that will tear you limb from trunk! Do you hear that?"

Frank was dashed along with the flying blacks, followed by shot after shot from the air-ship, and when the blacks were safely sheltered behind the rocks again, Despard accused Frank of their misfortunes to the chief, and urged that he be taken to the buried city and sacrificed.

To this the chief readily assented.

Frank was thereupon released from the cross, and they carried him through the ruins to a great arched gateway of stone, entering the side of the mountain in the face of a cliff.

A huge wooden door was swung back upon its pivot, and the chief and Despard, followed by two blacks who carried Frank, passed through the opening into the darkness.

Torches were ignited, raised aloft, and they passed into an enormous cavern, the sides and roof of which could not be seen, so impenetrable was the gloom.

Frank shuddered, for he realized that a fearful fate awaited him.

On they went a hundred yards or more in the gloom, and a second door was reached, opened, and they stepped into daylight.

It was an enormous amphitheater filled with the ruins of houses and temples—in a word, it was the golden city.

Flung upon the ground Frank was left to his fate, and the others hastily withdrew and closed the door again.

Frank arose to his feet and glanced around.

For an instant he saw nothing to arouse his alarm, but at this very fact he shuddered, for he knew that there was some fearful danger lurking around him, but did not know from what quarter to expect it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN A DEN OF HORROR.

THE place in which Frank had been cast was a vast amphitheater in which stood the ruins of what had once been a small city; but the houses and temples, ravaged by time, had fallen to decay, and lay half shattered on the level ground.

A wall, almost smooth, arose all around, a mile in height, and these cliffs presented the same strange, red appearance that the blood-red rock had shown, by which Frank inferred that armies of ants had taken possession of them in places.

Above soared several white eagles, and the ruins were invested by thousands of chattering parrots and lyre-birds, honey-eaters and plovers, while everything was overgrown by vines and weeds.

Frank's arms were bound behind his back, but his legs were unhampered, and he walked through the door of a temple.

The roof had fallen off, and a cry of amazement burst from his lips as he observed that the pillars of the place, the altar and the fugs, dishes, founts and ornaments were made of massive gold, incrustured with precious stones.

"Wonderful!" he muttered, fairly dazzled at the sight of such profuse riches. "This place alone contains a vast treasure. Here I am all alone, cast into this silent city. But I see no cause for apprehension, for—"

But just then there came a terrific whirling, as if a thousand wheels were buzzing over his head, and an immense flock of huge vampire bats came down upon him.

The shock knocked him down, and as he turned his startled glance upon them they settled so thick-

ly all over him that nothing of his face, body or limbs could be seen.

Frank saw what they were and a shudder convulsed him.

They bit into his flesh, and then began to suck the life blood out of him with the voracity of utter starvation.

The pain was so intense he had the utmost difficulty in restraining his cries, and rolled over and over upon the littered floor to crush the demoniac pests off of him.

He stood an excellent opportunity of being killed, but remembering that they could not see in daylight, he arose and rushed out into the street again, where he managed to brush those that remained away from his aching body.

No sooner was this done, though, when a loud yelping at every quarter of the city was heard, causing the birds to fly up into the air, uttering cries of affright, and out from every street came rushing pack after pack of dingoes, or wild dogs, the beasts gathering all around Frank.

He fastened a look of dismay upon the snarling and snapping canines, and managed to back himself up against the side of a building.

"Out of the frying-pan into the fire!" he gasped. "Oh, what am I to do to defend myself now, with my hands tied behind my back in this manner? Horrible! Horrible! They will tear the flesh from my living body! Despard told the truth—this is veritably a den of wild beasts!"

Hundreds upon hundreds of the dingoes inhabited the dead city, and the pack of snarling, fiery-eyed beasts, augmented by fresh numbers, grew bigger every minute, until Frank was hemmed in by a living mass, through which it seemed impossible he could pass and live.

Those that were nearest to him, observing that he did nothing to injure them, became so emboldened that they rushed in at him, and buried their fangs in his legs.

He kicked at them, screamed at them, and sought by every means to drive the voracious beasts back, but had little effect in getting rid of them.

"I must reach some place out of their way," he thought, glancing around. "And the only place I can see is the inside of one of those stone buildings. I'll risk a dash!"

He could do nothing but spring into the midst of the howling pack, and they scattered for an instant, leaving him a clear path, along which he ran toward the doorway of one of the houses.

The whole pack came flying after him, and he ran with all his might, but not so fleetly as the dogs.

Their howling, baying and snapping so close at his heels was dreadful, and he was panting hard, lacerated by their teeth, and half exhausted, by the time he reached the door, and dashed into the house.

A stone staircase led him up to the second story where he saw a lavish display of riches in golden vases and images; but a bitter smile of contempt crossed his face for he knew that none of the wealth could purchase him immunity from the peril threatening his life.

The dingoes came rushing up after him, and he stood guarding the top of the stairs for a minute, kicking the beasts down again.

It was exhausting in the extreme though, and he was finally forced to desist, and dart into one of the rooms.

The floor rocked and trembled a moment, then gave away.

There followed a crash, and the next moment down it went with him, and he was buried in the rotten debris with the senses knocked clean out of him.

How long Frank laid there he did not know, but he revived with a splitting headache, and found himself buried in a mass of dirt from which it was difficult to extricate himself, the moon was shining in the starry sky, and the dogs had all disappeared.

When Frank struggled out of the heap of dirt, he found that the bonds that held his hands behind his back had been broken by his fall, and that he ached all over from the teeth of the bats and the dingoes.

He found a revolver in his hip pocket, fortunately, and, stealing out of the house, he glanced around.

The street was alive with loathsome lizards and frogs with peculiar colored bodies, some of the lizards being of the Monitor tribe, able to burrow, swim, climb, or hop like kangaroos, the reptiles measuring eight and nine feet in length, and possessing the singular power to change from light to dark, or from yellow to gray and red.

He had scarcely taken note of the obnoxious things when he saw the gateway open, and Ralph Despard appeared in the opening.

He clutched a revolver in his hand, and peered around with the look of a demon incarnate upon his face.

The moment his glance encountered Frank he

started, and, raising his pistol, he aimed it at the young inventor.

Frank was as quick as he was, covering the man at the same juncture he was aimed at himself, and without uttering a word, they both exchanged three shots apiece at each other without stirring.

The first bullet missed Frank, the second hummed by his head, and the last tore a piece of cloth from his sleeve.

At the last shot Despard uttered a yell of agony, flung up his arms, and reeled back into the doorway.

He would have fallen, but quickly recovered himself, and, darting through the doorway again, he vanished.

"I hit the beggar!" muttered Frank.

It was some balm for what he had suffered, and he stole cautiously along the street to try and find a means of escaping from the walled-in city, as he knew it would be impossible to pass the blacks, if he attempted to go out through the gate in which Despard appeared.

He made a complete tour of the desolate city, meeting with the dingoes again frequently, but hurled stones drove them off.

The walls were unbroken all over, and not to be scaled very easily, but he found a place up which he thought he could climb.

It was a perilous undertaking—there were no red ants there and daylight was breaking in the east when he found the spot.

The climb was up an almost perpendicular surface of the cliffs, only a tiny ledge here and there offering a hand and foothold.

But the indomitable youth began the ascent.

"If I can reach the top of the cliffs," he thought, "I may be able to get back on board the Greyhound again if my friends, have not been caught napping and lost her."

Every moment as he climbed up, he feared that a slip of the hand would precipitate him down to the rocks again.

Beneath him stood an old house, and he mounted up, up, up, until at last nearly half the distance was attained.

There was a large boulder above him, and as he put his hands on it he found it loose, and it toppled over and fell.

Seeing that its bed offered a good hold, he thrust up his hand to seize it, when a warning hiss assailed his ears.

He shivered and drew back, when out of the aperture darted the heads of a nest of venomous pythons!

The reptiles made such a vicious and sudden attack upon Frank that he drew back with a shudder, and losing his balance, he began to slip.

"My God, I am falling!" he groaned.

The next instant his fingers relaxed their hold, and as a wild cry of horror pealed from his lips he fell!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BELEAGUERED CITY.

FRANK'S fall from the face of the cliff, when the pythons attacked him, had nearly put a period to the adventures of the young inventor.

The sun was streaming down upon the amphitheater of the city of gold, when he came to a realization of the predicament he was in, for the senses had been completely knocked out of him by the fall.

He found himself lying buried in the debris of rotten roof and flooring of the house which stood beneath the spot where he had attempted to scale the cliffs.

Perhaps it was owing to his having landed on the yielding mass, softened by the decay of centuries, that his life had been saved when he fell.

At any rate, beyond a severe shaking up, he had suffered no serious injury, although he ached badly and was stiff in every joint when he dug himself out and regained the street.

He yet had his revolver with four shots left in it, and drove away a pack of wolfish dingoes that came barking and yelping too near him.

How he was to get out of the buried city he did not know, nor could he subsist without food and water.

He sat down dejectedly upon a rock to turn the matter over in his mind, when a shadow fell athwart the street, and he glanced skyward.

Then his heart gave a great throb, for he saw the Greyhound soaring above him in the air.

He jumped up and discharged his revolver again and again.

The air-ship came to a pause, and he saw Barney peering down over the railing, then the face of Harry Howard appeared.

Well knowing that sound arises to an incalculable height, and that they could easily hear his voice, he shouted:

"Greyhound, ahoy—ahoy—ahoy!"

He stood out in the middle of what must once have been a public square, and waved his arms to

attract the attention of his friends to where he was.

They soon perceived him, for he saw them gesture back to him, and a moment afterward the air-ship came circling down toward the ground.

Down, down, down she swooped like some huge bird of prey, until at last she settled in the square near Frank, and Barney shouted gleefully:

"Be their poker an' tongs, but he's as safe as a thrivet?"

"By Jove, Reade, we thought you were gone!" said Howard.

"Ay," replied Frank, cheerily, "but it is one thing to purpose killing Frank Reade, Jr., and another thing to accomplish it! I've got nine lives, like a cat, it seems."

"An' by gol," exclaimed Matt Mainbrace, delightedly, as he came forward, "if here we ain't right in their werry middle o' ther city o' gold!"

"Can it be possible that this is the place we are seeking?" asked Dr. Vaneyke, advancing.

"Come aground," said Frank. "You will be more than amazed at the wondrous riches lying in this strange, buried city. Besides, I want to hear your adventures."

"They were all off the air-ship a moment later shaking hands with Frank, who hastily sketched what happened to him.

Then the doctor said to him:

"When you were carried away by the negro giants we were besieged all the rest of the day, but gave them a very hot reception with the electric gun. In return they showered burning arrows upon us and hurled javelins at us barbed with live coals. Of course they did no harm, but the boomerangs came near striking each individual of us several times, and finally we arose in the air to get out of their way, and cruised around all night looking for you. The result is as you see."

"Then let us lose no time at emptying the keel of the Greyhound of the portable ballast in order to substitute gold for the lead. We can load the ship down to her utmost capacity, and while Ralph Despard and the Australians are guarding the only entrance to this queer city we can accomplish our design and depart."

Matt Mainbrace had taken Barney, Pomp, Harry Howard and May Blossom in tow, and was leading them around the city, showing them all the wealth and peculiarities of the strange city.

When they returned preparations were made to cargo the air-ship with the precious metal incrustated with jewels, and when the lead had all been taken from the keel and the hold, Mainbrace showed them where the best and choicest of the treasure was to be found.

They all set to work with a will to gather in the golden images, pillars, ornaments and services, and within a comparatively short space of time they had the air-ship half loaded with an immense fortune.

It was just at this juncture that an interruption came in the form of Despard, who appeared at the huge door, peered in and saw them at work.

His rage knew no bounds, and he discharged his revolvers at them, and fled to arouse the blacks.

"We are discovered!" cried Frank. "Arm yourselves and prepare to defend the door. In a few moments Despard will return accompanied by all the blacks, and they will fight like tigers to drive us out, and kill us before we can get away with this treasure."

"Once we get control of the door," said Harry Howard, as Barney rushed on board to secure their arms, some hand-grenades, and to prepare the electric gun, "we can hold it against an army."

"Can't we barricade it?" questioned the professor.

"No," replied Frank; "there are no means in this place—not a rock, and the composition of these old houses is so rotten it could not withstand anything."

He had hardly spoken when a wild, savage yell broke the stillness, and in at the huge gate rushed Despard and a score of the blacks, while crowding in back of them came an innumerable crowd.

"Barney, hurry up!" shouted Frank.

"Hurroo! I'm here!" came the cheerful reply, and just after hurling a stack of rifles over the side the jolly Irishman flung a grenade into the midst of the in-rushing blacks, and it exploded with a fearful report, dealing destruction to several of them.

Boom! boom! boom! roared another fusillade of the grenades from Barney's hands a moment later, and the echo had hardly died away when a rattling discharge from the rifles of Frank and the rest burst out as they drew up in single file abreast beside the Greyhound.

There came an answering volley of arrows, boomerangs, spears, and hatchets from the bushmen, and the cries of the wounded and dying blacks sounded with mournful intonations above the din of the firing.

May Blossom had gone inside of the air-ship out of danger, and despite the deadly fire poured into their midst the giants did not waver at the deaths of their foremost ranks, but kept pressing on.

They were ferocious over the advantage gained by our friends, and were incited on by Ralph Despard.

That cowardly wretch did not expose himself to the fire of the Greyhound men, but having incited the blacks, he carefully ensconced himself behind a sheltering ledge and from there kept yelling to them to keep them advancing.

A heap of dead and wounded men began to blockade the entrance, and a few stragglers who succeeded in getting well within the fearful death-trap gate went off at an angle, but were shot down in their tracks.

Frank's fire was so persistent and overwhelming the Australians at length were forced to retreat back through the gate again, leaving fully two score of their number lying upon the ground of the city at the entrance dead, dying and wounded.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank. "They retreat. The battle is ours! There goes the last of them, and the gate closes with a crash! See—it is sadly shattered with bullets and the flying iron of the bursted hand grenades."

Not one of the aerial adventurers was hurt.

Within a moment the place was vacant, none of the blacks but those injured in the fray remaining, nor could a sound be heard from them.

"Better pitch in again while we have a respite," said the doctor, "and finish loading the Greyhound, for the blacks may return to the attack with augmented valor and numbers at any moment."

"Good," assented Frank. "I will remain on deck at the electric gun, and protect you while you are busy."

This arrangement was most satisfactory, and the rest resumed their interrupted toil with a zest that showed how anxious they were to finish and leave that place.

Frank stationed himself at the electric gun, which he trimmed to bear upon the gate, and busied himself at grading it to throw its electric bolts at just the proper angle and distance to reach the entrance.

Several times as the work progressed the gate was flung open, and a number of the yelling blacks dashed in with a great show of ferocity and valor, but a few of the deadly shots from the electric gun soon ended the existence of some, and drove the others back out of sight again.

The hold of the Greyhound was soon filled, and they were just about to end their work, when a cry from Frank brought them all rushing to the air-ship.

"What is the matter, Reade?" demanded Harry Howard.

"Look up there! I fear our lives are lost," replied Frank.

He pointed at the cliff-tops encircling the great basin, and as the others looked up they shuddered with horror, for the rocks were swarming black with the negroes.

All around the city hundreds of the giants could be seen, and as a sullen roar pealed from their throats, at a preconceived signal they began to tear up the adjacent loose rocks.

A moment afterwards the air became black with shower upon shower of the missiles, as they hurried them down into the city at the entrapped adventurers.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TERRIBLE ENDING OF THE VILLAIN.

Down came the rocks, those hurled by the blacks nearest to the air-ship falling with thunderous crashes in close proximity to the Greyhound.

Frank dashed into the pilot-house, shouting:

"Shoot at the nearest to us! Drive them back from the cliff tops, or their missiles will smash the ship to pieces, and we won't be able to escape!"

Boom! came a rock on the deck, just as he spoke, and it crashed through, close beside Pomp, causing the ducky to utter a wild howl and spring aside.

It went through the deck like a cannon ball, and fell into the hold, and the rifles on deck were seized, and the besieged men began to blaze away at the blacks, driving them back out of sight.

The professor dashed over to the gun, and elevating the barrels, he shot bolt after bolt up at the men on the cliffs, while Frank, seeing that everything was in readiness for flight, pulled out the helix lever, and the wheels began to gyrate at full speed.

But the air-ship would not budge!

Around and around whizzed the spirals, a blank look of dismay sweeping over Frank's face, and the air-ship strained and tugged, and creaked, but not a move did she make, and the young inventor shouted:

"She is overloaded! Heave over some of the

gold! The weight is more than the spirals have power to lift!"

It was a reluctant and thankless task to sacrifice any of the precious cargo, but it had to be done, or they would be stoned to death by the exasperated blacks.

Barney and Pomp lost no time in useless regrets, but gathered part of the golden freight, and when the Greyhound had been relieved of several hundred pounds of the gold, she slowly and laboriously ascended to a height of fifty feet, and then remained stationary!

It was exasperating, and Frank called out:

"Over with more of it, boys—hurry—hurry!"

His injunction was occasioned by seeing that as he was nearer to the blacks, they had a better chance to hit the Greyhound with their rocks than they had before.

Down went several huge golden pillars, and a large image of Buddha; and just as another immense shower of missiles came flying through the air, the Greyhound arose to a distance of seventy-five feet more, thus bringing her about twenty-five feet above the heads of the blacks.

They were shouting and dancing about frantically as they saw the air-ship and her passengers eluding them, and sent volley after volley of their weapons up into the air at the ship, without doing it any damage.

"Holler, yer spalpeens!" shouted Barney, derisively, as he flung a grenade down at a crowd below the ship, which had begun to forge ahead as Frank put the propellers in motion, "an' begob it's little good ther same may be adoin' yez! Fall off ther! Fall off!"

"Looker dar, honey!" exclaimed Pomp, excitedly. "Wha' yo' call dat figger—huh? Ain't it Ralph Despard?"

"Faith it is that—an'—oh, howly schmoke!"

There came a sudden jar at the car, and Pomp cried:

"De drag rope am down, an' dem yaller niggahs wid whiskers done cotch hold ob it fo' shuah! See dar!"

It was a fact that the drag rope had been down as they ascended, and a score of the bushmen and Ralph Despard caught hold of the rope as it swept along the ground close behind them, their clutch causing the violent jar which had been felt.

The Greyhound was brought to a sudden standstill by the weight thus brought to bear upon her. Frank saw what the trouble was, and pulled out the propeller lever to its fullest extent.

There was a powerful battery on, and he knew that the further he got from the mountain side the higher the Greyhound would be from the ground, as the earth sloped away from beneath her.

Hence there was no use to sacrifice any more of the gold in order to rise higher, if he could only propel the boat along far enough to let the end of the drag-rope clear of the ground, which it then was sweeping.

With the additional force of battery Frank put on, the ship suddenly darted ahead, and dragged the blacks along with it, as they clung tenaciously to the rope.

"Drop some grenades down among them!" shouted Frank.

"Wot's ther matter wid cuttin' ther rope?" demanded Barney, pulling out his knife eagerly.

"No! We can't afford to lose it."

"Pomp, git some grenades, yer aould black-guard!"

"I'll give some of them a ride to their graves."

"But, Masther Frank, shure some av thim is cloimbin' up."

"Is Despard on the rope yet?"

"He is that, forinst ther others, an' up hoigh-est."

"And the fiery chasm is just ahead of us!"

"Is it a roastin' he'll be afther gittin'?"

"Ay, and a good one, too! We'll gridiron him well."

"Lord save ther villian then, ser."

Pomp came back just then with some grenades, and the deadly explosives were sent down into the midst of the blacks, who were trying to anchor the Greyhound, creating such consternation among them, that all but a couple let go their grip on the rope.

Relieved so suddenly of their weight the air-ship suddenly darted ahead, and the land receding from beneath Despard and the two others they suddenly found themselves dangling at the end of the rope in the air.

Every instant they were carried higher and higher from the ground, and as the two blacks became cognizant of this fact they let go and fell.

Whatever happened to them was a mystery to those on the air-ship, but Despard became frightened at the height at which he suddenly found himself and held on.

Frank steered the air-ship for the fiery chasm, up through which the volcanic flames were darting, and as the ship drew near it and Despard saw his danger he yelled wildly:

"Help, help! Oh, God! I will perish! Forgive me, Reade! Spare me, as you hope for mercy yourself!"

He writhed and groaned as he felt the heat intensifying as the Greyhound drew nearer to the awful chasm.

Everybody had gotten under cover for the fearful ordeal of passing over the flames instead of crossing over the bridge.

"We may perish, too," thought Frank, grimly, "but I doubt it. The test on the Greyhound will be a fearful one."

The next instant the air-ship hovered over the fiery abyss.

There came a wild shriek from Ralph Despard, his withering and squirming body gave a convulsive whirl, his hands relaxed their hold, the gas nearly strangled him and he fell down into the yawning gulf below.

And thus perished the villain.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FIRE-BALL FROM HEAVEN.

DARTING through the awful heat leaping up from the yawning jaws of the gulf below, the Greyhound sped across the crater of the volcano, and had half crossed it, when the helices became affected by the intense heat and slackened speed, while the revolutions of the propellers diminished.

Frank's heart almost ceased to palpitate.

"Great Heaven! what heat!" he gasped. "I can hardly breathe. What is to become of us? Must we follow Despard and fall down into the crater too? The ship is sinking, and she does not go so fast!"

Slower and slower revolved the wheels, and further down sank the Greyhound, until the heaving tongues of fire swept all around the steel hull.

Such of the iron work that was exposed to the worst of the heat became red hot, and the glass in the port-holes began to melt and run in streams.

Had it not been for the Asbestos lining of the Greyhound, the steel hull would have thrown such a fearful quantity of hot air inside of the ship that those who had gone below must have inevitably perished.

Slowly she dragged along, the distance spanning the mouth of the long crater seeming interminable to Frank, although at the rate of speed traveled by the air-ship they were no more than a couple of minutes exposed to the fiery blasts that shot up from the bowels of the earth.

There came a sudden jar just as Frank was on the verge of despair, and looking ahead through the vast waves of heat-clouds, he saw that they were across the canyon, and that the sharp, ram-like prow of the Greyhound had hit against a projecting ledge on the other side.

There she stuck an instant, hanging over the edge of the abyss. Then she swung around sideways, and the hull was flung over upon terra firma, the motion of the helices and propellers dragging her along the ground like a sloth down the mountain side.

Thus she slid and bumped on for some distance, the drag-rope burned off, and the ballast of gold alone keeping her on a level keel, the efforts of her motive power exhausted.

She had not gone far when there sounded a fearful explosion in the middle deck-house that blew the roof off, for the fearful heat had ignited a can of gunpowder.

Then the Greyhound came to a complete standstill, her electrical machinery so overcome by the heat that it was temporarily rendered useless.

Frank sank down on his knees nearly overwhelmed, for the glass in the pilot-house was at a white heat.

He kicked open the door, and as a draught of cool air swept in, he revived and wondered how the rest had fared, cooped up in the cabin below decks.

A crowd of the blacks had followed the air-ship across the bridge, and upon seeing her fall disabled, they came rushing toward her, uttering fierce cries of satisfaction, with the hope of annihilating the passengers on board of her.

But the first of them who caught hold of the heated hull hastily sprang back, screaming with pain from being severely burned by the heated steel plates.

They apprised the others of the condition of affairs, and the negroes retreated to a safe distance and held an animated conversation regarding a means of attack.

Frank went out on deck and observed the heat waves arising all over the air-ship; but it was much better out there than it was within the pilot-house.

He had hardly gone out when Dr. Vaneyke appeared in the doorway of the cabin wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Hello, Frank—have we foundered?" he gasped.

"The heat has overcome the electrical apparatus, sir."

"By Jove! that is bad!"

"How are all the rest in the cabin?"

"Half-smothered and overheated."

"Well, we are across the chasm, doctor."

"And I see the blacks have followed us."

"Yes, but the heated hull will keep them at a respectful distance."

"What is to be done now?"

"Absolutely nothing but wait for the ship to cool off."

"We are melting. This is an oven—a fire furnace!"

"Still, it is better than being where Despard is, doctor."

"Ah, yes—did he fall from the rope?"

"Down into the volcano's crater!"

"Horrible! Horrible! But it is a good ridance."

"Well may you say so; he injured all of us badly."

"And what is our course when we can ascend?"

"Straight back to the Pacific, homeward bound."

"For which I am truly thankful, Frank."

"Call the others up, doctor; it is cooler out here."

"You are right. Heigh-o! I'm nearly suffocated!"

The doctor brought the others up from below, and Frank made a careful examination of all parts of his craft to see if any serious damage had been sustained.

Fortunately, though, the Greyhound was perfectly navigable, and Frank's fears were dispelled.

She lay in an open, rocky space close to a cluster of cedar-trees through which flowed a limpid brook, beside which the blacks had congregated, chattering like magpies.

An hour passed by, and Frank went into the pilot-house and tried to get the machinery in motion again.

To his amazement and delight it responded at once, and as the helices spun around and the propellers revolved, the Greyhound arose in the air again as if nothing had happened, leaving the amazed and disgusted natives to vent their disappointment in shouts and invectives and a parting shower of missiles.

The farther the air-ship sped from the mountain in a northeasterly direction, the higher she became from the earth, and the cold upper strata of air promoted the cooling of the hull more expeditiously than the lower air did.

In fact, within an hour all vestiges of the heat were gone, and at a distance of a thousand feet above the earth she went plowing along over the tall grasses, swamps, forests, rivers and hillocks with her precious burden of gold, all hands on board in a jubilant state.

The day had half been spent, and by the time night had fallen over the continent they were far away from the mountainous region of Central Australia, and were heading straight for the Pacific seaboard in the direction of Queensland, where Frank hoped to strike the coast along the Great Barrier Reefs neighboring Cumberland Island.

After supper Matt Mainbrace took his trick at the wheel.

The old sailor was half wild with delight over the success of the voyage thus far, and as Frank entered the pilot-house for a few minutes' chat with him, he said, emphatically:

"By gol, Mr. Reade, ther don't 'pear ter be wery much lunacy in old Matt Mainbrace's yarns about ther treasures of ther mountain o' gold now, do they, sir?"

"Your story, Matt, was so wonderful," replied Frank, "that it was not surprising people discredited it. But we have substantially proved its truth, my boy, and the vast treasure on board the Greyhound is bound to make somebody rich when we reach civilization again."

"Somebody?" echoed the old sailor, giving a hitch at his baggy trousers and spinning the wheel around. "Why, Lor' save yer, sir, everybody on board share an' share alike, ekal. That's far an' square, sir, an' that's ther programme."

"It shall be as you like, Matt. But see! What a glorious night! The sky, a grand dark-blue, is studded by millions of bright twinkling stars, while off on the eastern horizon the full, blood-red moon is rising in a halo of crimson beauty!"

The old sailor gave a grunt, then a start, then a yell.

"Holy jings! what's that?" he cried.

There sounded a thunderous clap in the sky, and as Frank looked up he too started, and his face paled.

"It is an immense meteor just burst above us!" he cried, in alarmed tones. "And see, Matt! There is an enormous fire-ball rushing through the atmosphere, leaving a trail of sparks behind it, and it is coming straight toward the air-ship!"

The old sailor's hands relaxed their grasp on the

wheel, and he sank down upon his knees, trembling with fear as his starting eyes became fastened upon the meteor.

With a whistling and roaring that would have made the spectator imagine that the world was coming to an end, a tremendous ball of incandescent fire as big as a house split into a thousand fragments over the air-ship, and the glowing, red-hot missiles came tearing through the sky directly toward the Greyhound.

CHAPTER XXXI. THE TWO EAGLES.

As the immense meteor shot down from the starry sky toward the Greyhound with a terrible explosion, Frank grasped the wheel which Matt Mainbrace had released.

The young inventor saw the direct path of the splitting fire ball, and he stopped the propellers and reversed their action in a flash.

The Greyhound came to a sudden pause and began to back, when with a deafening roar the meteor rushed down at the air-ship, struck the ram on the prow, knocked it off, glanced outward, and continued on to the earth, where it struck with a bang!

There was a vast upheaval of dirt and stones as the Greyhound was knocked over sidewise and driven earthward by the violent blow; and an instant later the glaring fire of the meteor vanished as the huge aerolite was buried a dozen yards in the earth.

The shock sustained by the Greyhound had thrown her down bow foremost; but as she was diving toward the ground, the propellers were reversed again by Frank, she shot forward, curved upward, and in a minute more she had risen to her former attitude.

Safe enough, except for a fearful scorching and the loss of the ram at the bow, she flashed ahead once more with wonderful speed, and ere the shocked passengers fairly realized that they were in great danger, they were out of it again.

They all came rushing on deck, but the air-ship was forging ahead a thousand feet above the ground, heavily laden with her ballast of gold, and Matt Mainbrace arose from his knees and glared at Frank, hardly able to realize that they had escaped the fearful danger.

"It is gone!" exclaimed Frank, presently.

"Ay, ay, sir," stammered the old sailor. "But whar are we?"

"Where we were before the meteor struck us."

"By gol, only your management done it, too."

"Of course. Had I left it to you, we might be smashed to pieces now."

"I veered clean off o' my figger-head."

"Which was an unwise an' unseamanlike act of yours."

"But my reckonin'-tackle went by the board, sir."

"Never mind, old fellow; the danger is averted now."

"Blast my timbers if I like wot I done, though!"

"Here come the others, alarmed. Explain the trouble to them, Matt."

The old mariner went out on deck, and in his own peculiar fashion made matters clear to the rest.

"An aerolite, eh?" said Dr. Vaneyke, entering the pilot-house. "I saw it passing; a regular monster, Frank. They are mighty dangerous chaps to meet with, too. You don't know where they are going to strike. Drifting about, beyond the atmospheric envelope encircling our earth, these wandering waifs suddenly take a fit to go off at a tangent, and drop unexpectedly within the center of gravity. Then they whiz! The magnetic force of the earth attracting the rascals, they fly toward it as a steel needle flies to a horse-shoe magnet. In the violence of their descent through the atmosphere, the little beggars become red-hot, owing to the swiftness with which they come; and the heat causes them to expand, while the cold induces contraction, when with a bang! they explode. A shower of sparks, a sudden whirl through the air, and presto!—with a thud the earth is reached, and the little devils are buried in the dirt!"

Frank burst out laughing at the doctor's graphic description, and calling the old sailor into the pilot-house again, he left him in charge of the wheel and went out on deck to examine the bow and ascertain what damage had been done.

It disfigured the Greyhound to lose the ram, but the injury could in no other wise affect her, and Frank congratulated himself that he had escaped with so little damage.

All that night and the following day the air-ship sped along over the Australian Continent, no event of any consequence occurring to mar the tranquility of the aerial voyagers on their homeward trip.

It was late in the afternoon when Frank stood aft, talking to Harry Howard and May Blossom, and the sun was declining over the western landscape.

"We are well over Queensland now, I calculate," he was saying, "for we have passed between the McKilnay and the Middleton mountain ranges, are heading for the Bowen Downs, and after we cross the Belyando and Sutter rivers we will go over the Blue Mountains and reach Cumberland Island, this side of the Great Barrier Reefs. Then ho, for an ocean voyage again."

"Rather dangerous to venture out on the Pacific, burdened down as the Greyhound is with the gold, isn't it?" asked Harry.

"Somewhat. But even if we should not be able to fly, the Greyhound is equally as good working like a steamer, so our danger is considerably diminished on that score."

"And we have got to get back to civilization again at any risk, you timid big goose," said May Blossom with a silvery laugh. "Now that you know Ralph Despard did not fall a victim to your duel over me, you ought to be mighty anxious to vindicate yourself in public, too."

"And I am, May. Moreover, there is another little matter—"

"You refer to our marriage? But you call it a little matter, you disparaging cheat! Oh, gracious! Is that all the value and importance you put on such a wonderful event! I have a great mind to box your ears well for you, sir."

Harry laughed as she pouted and blushing turned away from him, caught her in his arms, and gave her a resounding kiss on her red lips.

Barney and Pomp stood aside looking on, and a broad grin overspread their faces, and they exchanged significant glances.

"Arrah, did you hear that?" whispered Barney, giving Pomp such a poke in the ribs that it made the darky grunt.

"G'way, chile! Wha' de matter wid yo' Kain't dem lubbers swap gumdrops ef dey wanten—huh?"

"Lubbers, be's they?" roared Barney. "Did yer hear that, Mr. Howard! Ther coon called yez lubbers, shure."

"Pon my word," said Harry, restraining a laugh, and facing Pomp with an assumed indignant look, "you may be quite a sailor, Master Pomp, but I want you to distinctly understand that I am not a nautical lubber, sir."

"Yo' am a lubber," retorted Pomp, frigidly.

"What—you rascal! How dare you insult me? Eh? Do you know that a lubber is a heavy, clumsy fellow, a lazy drone, a bulky clown, good for nothing, and an object of contempt?"

"Amn't yo' Missy Blossom's lubber? Huh?" sulkily asked Pomp. "Dis niggah done know mighty well how to talk English, an' yo' needn't be so proud an' stuck-up, needer, Massa Howard."

He was quite indignant over the matter, and shuffled away, his thick lips unable to pronounce a v, and Barney uttered a roar of laughter that so chagrined him, he picked up a deck swab from a bucket of slush, and chased the jolly Irishman down below, threatening to mob him.

Matt Mainbrace kept the wheel, and after the others had all turned in, Frank came out on deck with a night-glass to view a range of hills stretching away below.

The night was rather dark, and a strong wind came howling along from the eastward, the Greyhound broasting it.

Far down below there was no sign of habitation, and Frank noticed that the weight of the gold was straining the ship, and had a tendency to keep her borne down earthward, in a most disagreeable manner.

"It will weaken the helices," he thought, "to be obliged to sustain such an immense weight, and I fear that we may have trouble over this matter before long."

He laid the night-glass down, and was just on the point of walking aft, when he heard a tremendous fluttering sound over his head, and hastily glanced upward.

There were two immense dark shadows hovering over him in the gloom, and just as he recognized them as two immense eagles, they uttered a hoarse cry, and suddenly swooped down upon him.

The shock knocked him down on the deck, and he uttered a shout for help, just as the two huge birds of prey fastened their sharp talons upon his body.

Matt Mainbrace started the search-light, and as the glare shot out on the birds, showing the old sailor what was occurring, the eagles shrieked hoarsely, and beating the air with their enormous, powerful wings, they soared up into the sky, carrying Frank with them.

A chill of dismay pervaded every fiber of Frank's being as he felt himself being lifted up in the air by the two giant birds, and he instinctively reached out his hands and caught hold of each of them by a leg.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MASKED RIDERS.

By the glare of the search-light the old sailor had seen the two eagles carry Frank from the deck of the Greyhound, and he at once gave chase to them.

Frank's position was very singular, and it required all his nerve to keep him from giving way to a fit of the utmost dismay at the misfortune which befell him.

Eagles, he knew, were very high flyers, and built their eyries on crags that were almost out of reach of the most expert cliffmen armed with ropes; and if these kings of the birds should carry him away as food for themselves and their young, he feared his doom was sealed.

The great birds fled side by side for a moment, but as their broad wings in flapping touched, they separated.

Frank had hold of each of them by its inner leg, but as soon as they spread apart his arms were stretched wide open and almost torn from their sockets.

The female bird is generally the largest, and Frank retained his hold upon this one and let the male go.

They both had hold of him with their talons, for one of them alone could scarcely have carried him away alone; but when he released his hold on the male, it was forced to relax its hold upon him, owing to its proximity to its mate's wings forcing it to fly apart from her.

The big female, suddenly finding itself unable to sustain Frank's weight alone, uttered a hoarse scream and let go its hold on him as he was dragging it earthward.

Frank had a perfectly level head, though, and divining that the eagle wanted to drop him, he caught hold of its other leg with his disengaged hand, and hung on to the ravenous thing with all his strength.

The youth's weight kept dragging the eagle down to the earth, despite its immense strength, and it wildly beat the air to sustain itself, its mate uttering shriek after shriek, and circling around and around it in its descent.

The Greyhound came darting after them, the bright glare of the search light slanting down upon the two eagles and their prey, thus lighting the scene up so that Frank could distinctly see all that was happening to him.

The old sailor's cries had brought the others out on deck, and Frank saw them all clustered upon the forward deck watching him, and heard them shout encouragingly.

While the now frightened eagle was descending and at the same time frantically beating its wings, to prevent itself falling, Mainbrace was increasing the speed of the air-ship, in order to try and overtake the eagles.

"They may reach the bird and give me a footing on the deck," Frank cogitated. "But still, before the Greyhound can overhaul me, the strength in the eagle's wings may give out, and it may fall to the earth with me and end the matter in my death."

It was very evident that the bird's extraordinary struggles to keep adrift in the sky were fast weakening it, for its efforts became fainter every minute and it seemed as if about to succumb, relax its energy and fall.

In this state of the bird it was an easy matter for the swift Greyhound to overtake it, and the air-ship curved down under Frank and was going on, when Pomp and Barney seized him and pulled him down on the deck.

He yet clung tenaciously to the eagle, and it fought with expiring fury to get away, but Barney's knife dispatched it, and the other one flew away screaming.

"There's an escape for you!" exclaimed Frank, pantingly as he released the dead eagle and arose to his feet. "The monster hadn't strength unaided to carry me, and I might have fallen with it down on that range of hills, as its strength was fast declining had not Matt Mainbrace managed the ship so skillfully as to save me."

"A most extraordinary adventure," observed Harry Howard.

"But, I am thankful to say, I am uninjured, save for a few scratches about my body made by the sharp claws of the eagles as they pounced upon me to carry me away."

"I am a fair taxidermist," said Dr. Vaneyke, as he pointed at the dead monarch of the air, "and it will afford me a good deal of pleasure to stuff this bird for you, Frank."

"Do so by all means, doctor. I'd like to keep it as a relic of this adventure," replied Frank with a shudder.

Barney carried the eagle to the doctor's apartment, and a short time afterwards all hands turned in.

Before daylight Frank was awakened by feeling Pomp shaking him, and started up in alarm as the darky cried:

"Massa Frank, de ship am fallin' down, sah!"

"What, the Greyhound falling?" gasped Frank.

"Are de accumulator jars exhausted of their supply of electricity?"

"No, sah. De indicators am all right, sah."

"Then what is the cause of the trouble?"

"Donno, sah. 'Spec's dat yo' fine dat out."

"Then come—we will go down to the battery-room."

He hurried on his clothing and ran out on deck, where he saw that the air-ship was drifting downward, Barney at the wheel, and the earth only five hundred feet below, a town or village of some kind several miles off, and a rolling woodland country beneath the Greyhound.

It occupied but an instant for Frank to get down in the battery-room, and he saw the automatic dynamo slowly working and keeping the jars stored with power.

The bearings of the helix-uprights and the propeller driving rod beds were properly lubricated, and none of the wires connecting the battery-cells were broken, nor was the insulation in any way imperfect in the room.

He observed, however, that the cable which passed through the dead-hole in the bulkhead was sagging, and that the chafing of the clustered wires on the edge of the woodwork was wearing off the rubber coating of the wires.

It was evident then that a wire had been broken between the pilot-house switchboard and the battery room.

In order to get at it, Frank passed through a door in the bulkhead that led him into the hold, and the moment he entered the doorway he saw the broken wire hanging loosely from the cable, both ends emitting a bright shower of sparks constantly.

This defective wire caused the leakage of force, and what was expended upon the air was lost from the motive power that concentrated upon the suspensory helix spiral wheels.

To repair the damage required that all the machinery should be stopped, as the current of electricity in this wire could not be shut off without stopping the entire flow charging the helices, for an attempt to mend it might result in a death-dealing shock, and Frank had no desire to run such long chances.

Accordingly, with a frown of annoyance upon his brow, he went up on deck and told Barney to descend to the earth, and explained to him what had happened.

The Irishman pulled out the lever that controlled the helices, and as they revolved slower and slower, the Greyhound settled down and landed in a large glen within a dense wood.

The landing aroused the others, and matters were explained to them, when Frank set about to repair the damage.

This was soon accomplished, but the young inventor did not know that the wire he substituted was badly insulated, and was destined to cause him a terrible lot of trouble in future.

"There is one thing very evident," he said to the others when he came on deck again, "and that is that we are yet overloaded with gold, and must abandon more of it if we wish to proceed."

"I noticed a village ahead o' our course, sor," said Barney, "an' shure it's there we moight turrun some av it inter bank notes."

"A good suggestion," said Frank, "but what we have we can't carry any further. Let us bury some of it in this glen. We may be able to come back some day and get it."

The others approving, the search light was turned upon the ground, as daylight had not yet broken, and with shovel and pick Barney and Pomp broke ground, making a large trench, while Harry and Mainbrace brought some of the gold up from below in boxes.

While they were taking it from the air ship to bury it in the trench, a troop of horsemen came dashing along a sequestered path in the woods, men who would have struck terror to the souls of all honest men, for they were armed to the teeth, and every one of them wore a half black mask on his face.

The gleam of the search light attracted their attention, and with accustomed caution they pressed through the trees, and from a hidden covert amid the verdant foliage they peered out and beheld what was going on.

Moreover the conversation of the innocent adventurers soon told these mysterious men that the air ship was heavily laden with gold and jewels worth several millions.

"A rich booty!" said the leader of the band. "Luck favors us, boys. And if we do not wrest this wonderful treasure from you ship my name is not Captain Darke!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"THE SHIP IS IN FLAMES!"

THE appearance of the masked horsemen, coupled with the remark uttered by Captain Darke,

clearly indicated that the men were lawless marauders.

It was no wonder that the cupidity of these knights of the bush was aroused at hearing tell of the fabulous wealth stowed away on board the Greyhound, and the brigands were instantly fixed in a determination to steal the cargo.

They watched the men bury several boxes filled with gold, and when Barney and Pomp had retired on board the air-ship to get instructions from Frank to fill the casks with fresh water from a nearby brook, they retired among the trees again, and half of them took off their masks.

There were twenty strong, reckless, daring men in Captain Darke's band of bushrangers, and they all presented the appearance of refined men who had probably been driven to refuge in the fastness of the wilderness from the authorities.

This was true, inasmuch as they were all escaped felons who had been transported from England to penal servitude in the Australian colonies, and it was owing to a revolt that they broke from prison and took to the bush, where, under the able leadership of Captain Darke, they thrived in a lawless manner.

Menaced by desperadoes of this stamp, the people on the Greyhound were surrounded by the utmost peril as they knew nothing of the danger, and were liable to fall into a cunning trap which Captain Darke was concocting to get the best of them.

Frank, Barney and Pomp left the air-ship, and went over to the brook where they busied themselves at filling a couple of casks with water, when they received a startling surprise.

It was a rapid discharge of fire-arms and the shouting of men, the trampling of horses' hoofs, and a moment later ten breathless, unmounted men dashed up to them pursued by ten masked horsemen, the whole crowd firing volley after volley at each other.

But the moment the horsemen perceived Frank and his two companions they reined in their beasts, wheeled about, and went dashing away amid the trees, where they disappeared.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank in surprise. "What does this mean?"

"Sir," exclaimed Captain Darke, approaching and bowing with military grace, "I and my companions are gentlemen from the town of Bloomsbury, out for a hunt in the bush, when we had the misfortune to meet with a band of brigands, who came from the Sutter river, over yonder. We fought, but ran, and they pursued us here, when upon sight of your people they fled."

"How unfortunate!" said Frank, completely deceived. "Any of you injured?"

"No, thank Heaven! But we are exhausted, and if you will afford us the shelter of your house, we will be truly grateful."

"I do not live hereabouts, sir," said Frank.

"Oh! I beg your pardon! How sorry I am! I feel faint and sick at heart, and much in need of an hour's rest with some food and stimulant, and my friends are in the same condition. Too bad, I assure you. Pardon the intrusion. We will try to evade the road-agents, and go on until we can find some hospitable roof."

"Hold on," said Frank, kindly. "You do not understand me."

"Oh, yes, I do. I am Lord Donald Darke, sir."

"Ah! but if you will listen I will explain to you that I and my friends are aeronauts, and we just landed here with a flying ship of my invention, which needed repairs. I have excellent accommodations, and beg to tender them to you and your friends until you are recovered. I can offer you a good meal, and wine, spirits and liquor. Pray come on board, your lordship, and I will do my best to entertain you."

"By Jove! this is queer," said Captain Darke. "But you are a jolly good chap, and I heartily thank you. Come on, gentlemen."

He shot a significant glance at his rascally, well-dressed followers, and beckoning to them they followed Frank on board the Greyhound.

Pomp brought up the rear, but Barney remained behind.

When they were all in the cabin, and the others on board had been told Captain Darke's story, they were shown the air-ship and told of part of the adventure our friends passed through by which the time Pomp had prepared a dainty repast for them, and they were treated with the utmost hospitality.

The meal completed, Barney suddenly came on board, and as he appeared in the doorway of the cabin with a peculiar look upon his face, Frank told him to fetch in some wine.

Barney went into Dr. Vaneyke's room before complying, and presently returned with five uncorked bottles and just enough glasses to supply the ten strangers.

Frank noticed that he and the doctor and Howard had been omitted, and reminded Barney of the fact.

The Irishman said he would get them, and winked at Frank in such a significant manner that the young inventor became somewhat puzzled.

But he knew that Barney had some object in view and could be trusted, so he made no remark.

The darky filled the glasses with wine, a rich Burgundy, and as each one of the strangers raised his glass they drew their revolvers from their pockets at a signal from their leader.

Frank observed the action and started.

"Your very best health, sir!" laughed the brigand captain.

He nodded to Frank and they all emptied their glasses.

"But, sir," said Frank, arising with a suspicious expression upon his face. "Those—pistols?"

"Aim!" exclaimed Captain Darke, abruptly.

"Treachery!" cried Frank, as every one in the room was covered by the pistols in the hands of the smiling outlaws.

"My good friend," coolly observed the outlaw, "we have shamefully deceived you, I am sorry to confess, for you are a very kind-hearted young man. But the fact is that we are aware that this strange vessel is laden with a vast treasure, and being gentlemen who live at other people's expense, we planned this scheme to become masters of the gold."

"By George!" exclaimed Frank, in dismay, "we are badly sold!"

"Sir, you are entirely at our mercy," was the bland reply. "We hold your lives in our hands. We could kill you all on the spot, but we won't, since you have been so kind to us, if you will act sensibly and obey my orders."

"And what are they?" demanded Frank, turning deathly pale.

"To submit quietly to imprisonment and allow us to take the treasure from this air-ship without creating any disturbance."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then we shall be under the painful necessity of shooting you."

"This is rough."

"Sir, I await your answer."

He motioned to the rest as he spoke, and they staggered to their feet.

"Begorra!" interposed Barney, keenly eyeing the thieves, "it's meself will answer you, so I will, an' it's a bloody boud defiance I'll be chuckin' up ter yer teeth shure!"

"What! you court—you court bloodshed?"

"This much fer yez!" exclaimed Barney, as he saw one of the outlaws reel and fall to the floor. "I schtayed behoind whin yez kem aboard, be-dad, an' be schpoyin' around I see ther rist av yer gang hoidin' in ther bushes. I heard what they said, an' soon tumbled ter ther lokes av yer game. Thin I kem back here, an' I met ther soldiers from Bloomsbury as was on yer thrall. I towld them where yer friends wor in ther woods, an' left 'em ter tackle ther bastes. They'll be here in wan minute fer yous."

"By heavens!"

"Be this an' be that, too," continued Barney, rapidly, as he observed the man swaying unsteadily, "afore I opened the wine shure I wint inter Dr. Vaneyke's rume, an' tuck a bit av a bottle av chloriform from his case, axin' his pardin fer a do-in' ther some—an' poured it inter ther wine yez drunk, an' bejabbers, its dhrudded yez arl are now."

But before the astute Barney had finished speaking, the whole band of outlaws was overcome by the drug and fell to the floor in various attitudes stupefied.

"Barney, you are a trump!" exclaimed Frank, warmly.

"Arrah, Masther Frank, it's a ryal flossh I be's!" said Barney, with a broad grin. "An' here comes ther sojers shure."

They were English cavalymen, and they came up on the air-ship, and told Frank that they had captured the lurking companions of Barney's victims, whom they fought, and then the drugged men were taken off the ship and conveyed with the rest to Bloomsbury and locked up.

That night the Greyhound ascended into the air and all hands but Pomp, who held the wheel, turned in.

It was hardly an hour afterward when Frank was suddenly awakened by a stifling feeling, and jumping out of his berth, he found the state-room filled with dense smoke.

Startled beyond measure, he quickly dressed himself and started for the door, when he heard May Blossom shriek:

"The ship is in flames!"

Horried and ignorant of the fact that the badly insulated electric wire which he had mended in the hold had created the fearful mischief, Frank rushed out on deck.

The Greyhound was in a mass of flames!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BARNEY AND POMP ON A SPREE.

The dreadful cry of "fire!" pealing out on land is a matter of thrilling terror to anyone, but high up in the air at midnight on board of the Greyhound, it was ten times worse.

The tired voyagers had all turned in to rest after they so summarily got rid of Captain Darke, and his twenty brigands, whom the Bloomsbury soldiers had taken away.

Only Pomp had been awake, standing in the pilot-house, steering the wonderful air-ship on her course toward the Pacific sea coast, and it was his cries that aroused May Blossom, and caused her to scream so loudly that Frank was awakened, and rushed on deck.

They had crossed the Sutter river, and were in sight of the Blue Mountains when Frank staggered out on deck in the blinding smoke, and saw the ship in flames.

The badly insulated wire he repaired, down in the hold, had come in contact with the wood work, and being charged with the enormous battery that controlled the helices, it had ignited the bulkhead, and set the ship on fire.

Everyone came rushing out on deck in the moonlight and a scene of the utmost consternation prevailed.

"How did this happen?" hoarsely demanded Frank of Matt Mainbrace, with whom he came in contact.

"Lor' bless yer, sir, I dunno," gasped the old sailor.

"Bedad it's frizzled beef we'll be in tin minnits," groaned Barney.

"Doctor Vaneyke!" shouted Frank. "The fire extinguishers."

"I've got some of them here!" shouted Howard running up. Pomp stuck manfully to the wheel, and was lowering the air-ship as fast as he could, while May Blossom, overcome with terror, had fallen to the deck in a faint.

Smoke and flames were pouring up through the crevices in the deck planking, out of the port-holes and up through the forward hatchway.

Harry Howard held half a dozen blue bottles filled with some kind of liquid, the fumes of which were capable of smothering the flames when the contents were emptied.

They all armed themselves with the bottles, and while three went forward to the hatchway, Frank and the doctor rushed down to the battery-room amidships.

A moment later the bottles went crashing down through the hatchway and in at the battery-room bulkhead door, there came a fearful hissing and sputtering, vast clouds of smoke and steam ascended, and the bright glare of light suddenly was extinguished by the fluid.

Bottle after bottle was hurled, and in a most incredible short space of time the fire was out.

It did not even have a chance to burn through the deck or the bulkhead, but when Frank went into the hold with a lantern he saw that it would not have taken much longer for the entire ship to have been gutted.

The damage chiefly consisted in the fire burning the rubber from the wires, but no other serious loss was sustained and a few glass insulators soon fixed the wires so that they could temporarily do no more mischief.

Several hours passed by, and in the meantime as Frank sent word to Pomp to keep the Greyhound up in the air, she sped along at an altitude of a thousand feet again, heading for the mountains nearest to a point where she could reach the sea at Cumberland Islands.

The idea of stopping at Bloomsbury to sell some of the gold had been abandoned, as the boxes they buried in the glen where they encountered Captain Darke's brigands had been left there, and their weight being off the Greyhound, she seemed able to proceed with facility.

The mountainous district was reached the next day, and as the sea burst upon their view in the distance, they saw that a long dangerous trip was looming up ahead of them.

"Did the fire injure any of the apparatus and make the Greyhound liable to meet with any accidents?" the professor asked Frank as they walked out of the cabin.

"It simply ruined the electric gun," said Frank, "but if the connection is severed with the dynamo, I can still work it."

"How so, if the electrical supply is shut off?"

"By using a leyden jar battery. I would charge the jars by connecting the outer coating with one of the poles of a Ruhmkoff coil and the inner one with the arms of a discharger, the other arm of which is in communication with the opposite pole of the coil. At a distance of three inches apart, the extremities of the discharger would emit a few sparks. On the other hand, if I connect the outer coating of the jar with one pole of the coil and the inner with the other, the poles of the coil being at the same time connected by wires set an inch

apart, the jars would be constantly charged and discharged without cessation. The discharge taking place as a spark three inches long, bright and producing an explosive sound continuously. Either of these connections would work the gun as well as the dynamo did. Now if I twist a platinum wire around the knob of a leyden jar and bring the ends near enough to the poles of a secondary coil to almost touch, a noiseless spark of feeble light would pass from each pole to the end of the platinum wire nearest to it at both interruptions. If the outer coating of the jar should be connected with one of the secondary poles the spark at the interruption at that side would suddenly become brilliant and noisy, and the noisy spark would kindle any combustible object. The wire I mended was charged almost the same way, and I can only attribute the origin of the fire to this cause."

"It seems plausible," assented the professor.

"In conclusion," said Frank, "to show you that the Ruhmkoff coil can do almost anything I'll tell you that when six jars are charged by a coil containing about two square feet of coated glass and are put in a series connection a continuous stream of dazzling light six inches long can be produced, accompanied by a noise that becomes fairly intolerable."

At this moment both Frank and the doctor were startled by hearing a terrific clatter of heels up forward, sounding much as if a jig were being danced, and then a wild roar, followed by the tinkling of a banjo in the hands of Pomp, and the voice of Barney followed, crying:

"Whisky? Shure, an' it's not a nagur knows how it wor invinted!"

"Niggah dunno nuffin' 'cept dat de barnjo been made in Noah's ark."

"Well, bedad, yez may as well hurrin forst as lasht how ther divil himself invinted ther rale ould schtuft, an' if it's a clune in Q, seven sharps, ye'll be aftier whangin' on that ould tin pan in double quick toime, shure, I'll tell yer all about it in a song. Let her go now, ould schmoked herrin's!"

A rattling accompaniment began, and Barney sang:

"Shure the divil, shipick an' schpan, dhropped in Ireland for a man.

An' he foun' a farmer cuttin' down ther corn; He got thirsty, shure, an' ran, an' perposed ter rush ther can.

But ther frightened farmer fled, an' soon was gone. In his rage he must asworn, an' his hot breath on ther corn.

Made a scheam that savored in a tashtful way. Vowin' that ther farmer'd mourn, off his foirey hat was torn.

An' ther divil wid ther corn began ter play."

An interlude of the banjo followed, and Barney went on:

"Forst he mashed it foine an' flat, and upon it down he sat,

An' around it schprinkled dew from off ther ground.

Then he schquazed it dhry, so that all the dhrops fell in his hat.

An' he snipped it wid a gintil, gurglin' sound.

Pretty soon he got quite frishky, for he had distilled pure whisky.

An' he reeled, an' danced, an' sang, an' dhrank all day.

In ther barn he found a donkey, an' he thought it was a monkey.

An' he yanked its tail ter make it hop away!"

Another short interlude followed this verse, and Barney continued:

"Now, ther mule was koind an' quoit, but that jerk kicked up a riot.

Faith he raised his heels, an' schtruck wid moight an' main.

Caught the divil in the belly, knocked him back into - oh, well, he

Won't be seen around that farm-house soon again! But while ahidin' in his mill, the farmer saw Old Nick dismill.

From ther corn a juice that schtole his sinse away.

An' there wasn't any quicker man ter make ther same good liquor.

An' it's that same whisky's dhrank ontill this day!"

The song had hardly been completed when Frank's attention was distracted from Barney's heels, which were clicking again on the deck, by seeing the Greyhound swooping down toward the sea.

He rushed up forward, and to his dismay saw that the pilot-house was empty, and the ship was plunging on without any one at the wheel to guide her.

Barney and Pomp were both prancing around on the forward deck, and the whisky bottle in Barney's hand, coupled with the wild actions and unsteady legs of his two friends, plainly told him that they were both drunk.

There was a stern look upon Frank's face as he dashed toward the two culprits.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CAST DOWN IN THE SEA.

WITHOUT saying a word to the two drunken men who were now roaring a waltz song, and went

reeling about the deck clasped in each other's arms, Frank rushed into the pilot-house, and glanced at the levers.

The one controlling the helices, wings and propellers, were properly notched, and should have kept the air-ship at her proper altitude, puzzling Frank not a little.

There was evidently something the matter with the machinery, and he shouted to Dr. Vaneyke to come and take the wheel.

"What is the matter?" hastily asked the worthy old scientist.

"I do not know—something is out of gear."

"I see that Barney and Pomp are three sheets in the wind."

"Ay, the rascals! We might have gone down into the sea for all the alarm they have given us of the fact. Hold her up as best you can, doctor, while I run down into the battery room again, and try to discover the cause of the trouble."

"And if we fall into the sea, won't the Greyhound float?"

"Yes, under ordinary circumstances, but the gold we are carrying might over-ballast her, and sink her."

"It is unfortunate that you did not have a steamer waiting to ship this gold somewhere along this coast, and the present danger would not have happened."

"True. Regrets and plans are now useless, though, and I doubt if we could find one to charter anywhere within hundreds of miles of our present locality. I'm off, sir."

He ran out on deck, leaving the wheel in the doctor's hands, struck against the two drunken dancers, just as Barney was in the act of putting on a few fancy steps, and they both fell to the deck in a heap, yelling for some one to throw them a rope to save themselves.

Frank paid no attention to them.

When he got down in the battery-room his attention was drawn toward the accumulator jars, connected with the dynamos, and he observed that they were all emitting sparks at the binding-posts, where they were joined to one another by connecting wires.

Every spark was a loss of so much electricity, and he saw that the motive power was leaking away, weakening the jars so that it was as much as the dynamo could do to keep them charged sufficiently to keep the machinery in motion.

"What can be the cause of this?" muttered Frank dismayed.

He made a close examination and saw at a glance what occasioned the trouble that threatened to dash them into the sea.

"The enormous strain brought to bear upon the machinery has gradually been wearing it away and weakening it," he muttered, "for the gold is more in weight by double than what I should burden the Greyhound with. The weight having ground down the wheels, and, being unable to do any more mischief there, has turned its attention upon the electricity, the strain causing this bad leakage. I can stop it for a while, but it is bound to return, and we would descend again. Yet something must be done and at once, too!"

These words scarcely had been uttered when he heard a tremendous tumult up on deck, and rushing up the stairs, the first glance he cast around showed him that the air-ship was darting down toward the sea.

Every one out on deck was wild.

Barney and Pomp were partially sobered up by the excitement, and stood clinging to the rail glaring down at the sea glistening but a short distance below.

Several miles ahead Frank discerned a small strip of ground rising up from the sea, which he correctly judged to be one of the Cumberland Islands which he had been steering for.

"Doctor Vaneyke!" he shouted, "can't you raise her?"

"Not an inch, Frank, although I've got the levers all the way out."

"In a few minutes we will plunge into the sea."

"I cannot help it, my boy."

"There is one remedy though, Harry."

"And what is that?" asked Howard, blankly.

"To sacrifice more of the gold."

"Ah, that's too bad."

"Can't be helped."

"How long will it do us any good?"

"Until we reach yonder island."

"Ah! I see. All right, Reade."

"Once safe on shore I may repair the damage."

"Shall we leave some overboard?"

"Yes. Hurry, hurry! Barney, Pomp! You indecent, drunken brutes, to neglect your duty so shamefully! Come and help!"

The two culprits had very guilty faces as they ran down below, and Matt Mainbrace looked disgusted.

"Blow me," he muttered, "if things keeps on this way long all o' ther cargo'll be jettisoned,

an' we won't get much o' that 'ere treasure. By jol, it's a shame!"

He ran after the others, and a minute later up came more of the gold on deck through the hatchway, and Frank and Howard seized it and hurled it over the side.

The keel of the air-ship was just grazing the crests of the waves as it went over, and as heap after heap of the precious metal, incrustured with diamonds, rubies and sapphires, went splashing into the sea the air-ship rose again.

She went up to a height of a hundred feet and sped along at a very much reduced rate of velocity, yet she was clear for a while of the water, and Frank cried:

"There! That will do, boys! Don't send up any more yet, but stay where you are awhile, in case of an emergency."

He heard a loud crackling noise coming from the battery-room, and went down again in a hurry, only to see that the sparks were now snapping fast and furious from the binding-post wires.

It was evident that the leakage was becoming worse every moment, and he went up on deck again.

"Doctor, what is her rate of speed?" he shouted.

"The indicator says only ten miles an hour, Frank, though the levers are out to the 200 notch," replied Vaneyke.

"We are losing power at a fearful rate."

"Can't you repair the damage?"

"Not while the wires are charged from the battery."

"Well, she is holding her own again."

"It will only last a few minutes, I fear."

"The island is only a league away now."

"But at the rate we are traveling it will take eighteen minutes for us to get there, at six minutes to the mile. Slow—dreadfully slow. And we are losing power in larger proportions every second of time that passes. I'm on pins and needles, sir!"

He keenly watched the progress of the air-ship for several minutes during which it went along at its present height, then it began to gradually sink down again.

"She is bound to strike the sea!" he muttered.

"Mr. Reade," said May Blossom.

"Well?" asked Frank, turning around.

"We have traveled one mile."

"Then six minutes passed while we were elevated?"

"Yes, according to my watch, as I timed our flight."

"It will take twelve more to reach the island."

"Yes, I've been calculating. Say six minutes elevation, and six of depression or descent. We will probably be down six minutes. Then but a loss of as much gold as you just threw overboard, once more will give us six minutes elevation again and that with the loss sustained during the descent would land us well up on the dry land."

"That is a neat calculation, Miss Blossom, but unfortunately we can only measure with our eyes, and mentally calculate what the sensitive retinas at the back of them reflect into our brains that we are only a league from shore. We may have miscalculated the distance by a mile or two. Distances are most deceiving on the water, you know. Hal! We are down again!"

"More ballast overboard!" cried the doctor.

Up came a large cask and several boxes through the hatchway from Mainbrace, Barney and Pomp. Frank and Howard seized them, and with regretful sighs sent them down into the sea.

The Greyhound ducked into the rolling waves, sending a shower of briny spray up over the deck, and glided along on top of them for some distance.

Then she sprang up into the air again, fluttered there spasmodically a few minutes, and with a sudden rush she came down and settled in the waves.

The helices had suddenly ceased whirling, and the propellers were rapidly coming to a standstill, while from the battery room emanated a series of explosions and shocks that plainly told Frank that the electric storing jars were emptied.

He was rather pale in the face as he watched the actions of the air-ship in the water, and his heart gave a great throb of dismay as he noticed that the ballast was yet too heavy for her, and that she was gradually sinking!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DAME NATURE'S CONVULSIONS.

CUMBERLAND ISLANDS were fully a mile distant when the Greyhound struck the sea, and as Frank observed that the ship was being dragged down by the sheer weight of the ballast, he turned to the others and exclaimed:

"I do not want any of you to become panic-stricken, but the fact is we are sinking."

A general murmur of alarm succeeded this announcement.

"Be calm!" shouted Frank. "We are not lost yet. There is a means of keeping her afloat. More of the ballast must go overboard. Our lives are more valuable than the gold."

"Can I aid you, Frank?" asked the doctor, coming out of the pilot-house. "There is no earthly use of my remaining at the wheel now."

"All hands set to work with a will!" replied Frank.

He worked methodically, swiftly and hard himself, and the rest emulated his example with a will. Boxes, barrels, packages and casks into which the gold had been stored were thrown from the hold, rolled and carried to an open gangway and thrown overboard.

Thousands upon thousands of dollars were thus cast into the yawning jaws of the remorseless sea, and the ship, settling down, was soon beamed under the waves.

The water began to wash up over the decks on all sides, and as the energetic voyagers worked on the water lapped up all around their ankles, and when it got half way up to their knees it began to pour over the coaming of the hatchway down upon the three men who were in the hold passing out the gold.

"Begorra! it's schwampin' we bes!" shouted Barney.

"Don't stop!" cried Frank, tussling with a heavy box, "and we will yet save her. Work on! Quick! Quick!"

The influx of water retarded them a good deal, but they grimly toiled on, and pound after pound of gold went flying overboard, until the settling of the inundated air-ship suddenly ceased, and she began to rise.

It was only a gradual, slow movement, though, and hundreds of pounds of the gold came out of the hold before the submerged air-ship's decks came up to a level with the surface of the sea once more.

At the moment she had gone down deepest, they were forced to work with such speed that they were all well-nigh exhausted before the job was finished.

This was caused by the fact that the influx of tons upon tons of water that swept over the deck weighted her down by getting in the hold and filling the place of the evacuated gold as fast as the ballast was taken out.

However, they overcame the trouble by the assiduity of their work, and when the Greyhound's burden was lessened, and she appeared once more freighted to the scuppers, they knew that the danger was past for the present, and that they might navigate her to the island.

"I've got a few studding sails on board," said Frank, when they were all assembled on deck, "and as the machinery has come to an entire standstill we can fasten the canvas to the helix uprights, and the rudder will steer us to yonder nearest island with this free wind in no time."

"You seem to have a remedy for every evil, Frank," said the doctor.

"Experience has taught me to be careful about everything."

"Where can May Blossom be?" asked Harry suddenly.

"I saw her enter the cabin," replied Frank.

"Then I'll go and see if she is all right."

"Good boy. And you Barney, Pomp and Matt get out those sails."

"Yis, sor," said Barney, saluting and moving away.

"Hold on, you villain!" interposed Frank. "Are you sober yet?"

"I am that, sor," said Barney, coming to a pause.

"Then explain to me where you and Pomp got that whisky."

"Twer a bit av a bottle I schmuggled aboard at Sydney for medical purposes, sor," said Barney, with a guilty look.

"And you was taken violently sick and needed it, I suppose, while in the discharge of your duty as pilot."

"Shure, an' it's cramps I had—"

"And thereby endangered all our lives."

"Mr. Frank, sor, bedad it's—"

"Have you got that bottle?"

"I think it dropped overboard whin I—"

"What is that sticking out of your pocket now?"

"Begorra, it's ther bottle! How surprised I am! Shure it must have—"

"Hand it over to me at once, and stop your lying."

"But, Masther Frank, there's only ther wee tashtie av a drop in ther bottom, an' it's a bornin' shame ter chook it inter ther say loike yer did that goold, more, be ther same token, that me wind-poipe is dhroy, an' me heart abreakin' intoirely me hard work."

"Drink what is left then, as you certainly have done your duty to save the ship from sinking. But mind you, Barney, and you, too, Pomp, a repe-

tion of this sort of an offense will meet with my severest displeasure."

"May ther saints av glory blase yer generous sool, Masther Frank, an' here's lookin' at yer wid me besht compliments, an' a-hopin' ther angels'll make yer bed in hiven—ogle, google, google."

The last peculiar sound was caused by Barney suddenly interrupting himself tipping up the bottle to his lips and taking a prolonged pull that emptied it.

The sails Frank mentioned were brought up from below and were rigged upon the helix uprights, and a pump connected by belting to the dynamo machine soon made the air-ship lighter by emptying the hold of the water she had shipped.

Frank took the wheel, and as the sails broke, out before a stiff southwesterly wind, the half-wrecked Greyhound forged on toward the island, and Harry Howard came out of the cabin with May Blossom, she having sought shelter there when they were working.

Within a short space of time the Greyhound forged up to Cumberland Islands, and being of such light draught, she glided through the shoaling water without any danger.

Beyond they could see the Great Barrier Reefs, an immense stretch that ran many miles along the eastern coast of Australia, the surf beating against them bursting with the noise of thunder, and the water dashing high up in the air from bursting.

There was a small lagoon directly ahead of the air-ship, and the high tide did not conceal a channel that ran into it from the sea, Frank steering the Greyhound through it with unerring precision.

They passed between two rugged cliffs of beetling black rock glistening with the water that broke against them, and rode into a small cove with a rocky shore that stretched away to where a few solitary palmy trees grew.

Frank then rounded up the Greyhound in the wind, an anchor was hove, and as they were all very much exhausted, and knew that they were safe enough for the present, they turned in to get some much needed rest.

The next day dawned ere they awakened, and Pomp prepared a good breakfast, to which all did ample justice.

An examination was made of the Greyhound, and Frank saw that he would have to beach her at high tide to make repairs.

This was accordingly done, and by the aid of all the rest she was put into flying condition in one day.

Frank then made an estimate of the weight of the remaining gold in the hold, and calculating the suspensory power of his machinery, he had some more of the gold taken out of the hold and buried on the island in order that the remaining weight would equibalance the power of the machinery.

Darkness had fallen by this time, the sky looked threatening, and rain began to fall.

A rumbling—a sudden shock—a terrific explosion and a vast upheaval of the earth suddenly startled them, and flung them down.

They were all dining in the cabin at the time, and as Frank rushed out on deck he felt the ship shaking and rocking on the ground in a frightful manner.

A peculiar, gaseous odor filled the air, and he saw the rocks, trees, ground, in fact the whole island shaking.

Then the truth suddenly flashed across his mind. "What is it?" gasped the doctor following. "I am nauseated!"

"Doctor, can't you understand this?"

"It seems as if the Judgment Day has come!"

"And it is almost as bad. We may be engulfed—swallowed up by land and sea at any moment!"

"Ah! I comprehend you!"

"It is an earthquake!"

Boom! Boom! Boom! came a sullen, muffled roar under the earth, and it was instantly followed by a terrible grinding and splitting noise, rocks fell crashing, the entire island was split in two, and volcanic flames leaped up from the gaping fissure all around the Greyhound!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GOLDEN IDOL OF BUDDA.

AN earthquake on one of the small Cumberland islands meant utter destruction, and Frank realized it at once.

When the last fearful explosion occurred, he felt sure that the yawning fissure dividing the island would certainly engulf the Greyhound in its jaws.

All the others had recovered themselves, and realizing what was happening, they lost all thought of finishing their supper, and rushed out on the deck.

In the darkness of the tempest-threatening night they could hardly have seen anything had it not been for the electric lights burning all over the vessel.

Frank rushed up to the pilot-house, followed by the doctor, and springing in, he pulled out the helix lever to raise the air-ship from the shaking ground.

At the same time he started the search-light. Its broad, piercing glare shot out ahead on the ground, and showed him that there was a vast rent in the earth beside the Greyhound, from which emanated furious, sullen roars, as the sea water washed in upon the burning underground gases, causing an immense sheet of steam to arise with a fierce hissing noise.

For an instant the Greyhound did not respond to the lever, and Frank began to get anxious. He had repaired the leakage of the accumulators, and substituted a battery of Leyden jars.

That the electric current was not strong enough to operate the ship was very evident.

The Greyhound remained motionless an instant, and Frank knew he would have no time to add more battery; then the helices began to revolve slowly, and with a spasmodic effort the air-ship rose to a height of a few feet from the ground, and sank down again.

A cry of terror from the others out on deck caused Frank to look over the side, and a deathly pallor overspread his face as he observed that the ship had fallen on the brink of the great split in the earth.

She was half on the ground and half overhanging the dark gulf, while from beneath her all the edge of the chasma was crumbling from her weight, and it became evident that in a minute more she would either topple over into the abyss or else the ground would give away beneath and send her crashing down anyhow.

Quick as a flash Frank apprehended the danger. And equally as fast he found the remedy.

A jerk at the helix-lever brought it to its last position, and he pulled out a brass plug in the connecting-plate at the bottom of the switch-board and thrust it in another hole, thereby disconnecting the Leyden jar battery from the machinery, and substituting that of the accumulators.

The moment the Leyden jar current was cut off, and during the brief interval required for the dynamo to operate and charge the wires, the machinery suddenly stopped.

The Greyhound, having nothing then to sustain it, began to slip down into the roaring chasm, the bottom of which could not be seen in the dense darkness below.

There came crash upon crash as the earth and rocks gave away, and a horrible, grinding noise that made the entire air-ship shake as she slid downward.

Everybody's nerves were drawn.

Death in a fearful form stared them rigidly in their faces.

Down went the Greyhound!

A groan pealed from every mouth.

The shock flung them over.

They glanced wildly around.

Darkness—dense darkness everywhere save for the electric lights.

Then there sounded a shrill buzzing and whistling.

The dynamo had taken hold of the machinery.

A moment of intense, anxious suspense followed.

Then up shot the Greyhound into the air with a swirl, the dark canyon left below, the convulsions of nature left below, the danger left below, and they darted to cloudland in safety.

Do cheer greeted their salvation.

Dragged thus suddenly and unexpectedly out of every mouth of the grave that gaped to receive them, each one sent a prayer to God of unutterable thankfulness.

It had been a most trying ordeal to pass through, once at the height of eight hundred feet over the island they found themselves comparatively safe again above the storm.

Several hours passed uneventfully by, the air-ship going on smoothly.

"Barney!" shouted Frank, a few hours before noon of day.

"Yes, sor!" replied the Irishman, who stood out on deck.

"Go down in the battery room and see if the wires are leaking."

"Ay, sor, an' it's troo ther chube I'll be after yer."

An interval of silence followed.

Frank had glanced down at the devastation on the island, and he saw the peculiar phenomena of lightning flashing amid the ascending clouds of red smoke and haze that came up from the island.

The earthquake had showed him to what a marvellous extent its throes extended by suddenly upturning the entire strip of land in a chaotic mass, and amid a vivid sheet of flame and smoke it then sank beneath the ocean's crest never to appear again.

What had once been the tiny island that proved

to be of such service to Frank and his friends was no more than a mass of scattered debris lying on the bed of the sea, its place taken by a smooth sheet of water that showed no trace of what it washed over.

"Masther Frank, ther jars is behavin' thimselfes!" came a voice up the speaking tube.

"Is the dynamo working properly?" called Frank.

"Reg'lar as an old clock."

"All right. Stay down there four hours, and watch the machinery. I am not going to have any more accidents happen us now just for the want of a little watchfulness."

"Och, it's a hermit's job, sor, an' as it's moighty lonesome I'll be, if yer would be kind enough to send ther nagur down wid me, Masther Frank, dear, shure an' I could whiole away ther toime more pleasantly be tazin' him wid me fut on ther tails av his coat—"

"There—there! That will do! I'm going to punish you for getting drunk yesterday by keeping you employed in solitary confinement, and shall send Matt Mainbrace down to relieve you after the time of your watch below expires."

"Faix, it's hard upon me ye be's."

"Not in the least."

"Then give me ther laist taste av consolation."

"How do you mean?"

"Set Pomp on a red hot schtove for foive minits an' let me hear him yell. Shure it would do me heart a power av good, sor."

Frank closed the tube without replying, a smile upon his face, and started the propellers faster just as the doctor came into the pilot-house to see how the machinery was working.

He held a golden image of Buddai, the aboriginal Australians' god, in his hand, he having taken it from a temple in the buried mountain city.

"What are you doing with that thing?" asked Frank.

"I am going to keep it as a curiosity. Representing the existence of Buddhism among those people, it confirms the fact that Buddhism is the prevailing religion of the world. Buddha means the 'Wise.' There are a variety of ways to spell it, and the Chinese, owing to the meagerness of their articulations, come no nearer the sound than 'Foe,' and for the same reason convert Bramah into 'Fan.' This one is an excellent type. See—it is incrustured with magnificent diamonds and other precious stones, and it weighs fully twenty-five pounds—feel."

He handed the image toward Frank, but unfortunately he let go of it before it was seized, and it fell with a violent crash.

The helix lever was directly beneath it, and it struck the handle such a violent blow that it knocked the jointed end in and broke the handle off.

Instantly the helices, put at full speed, whirled faster, and the Greyhound shot up into the air at a fearful velocity!

Both Frank and the professor uttered ejaculations of dismay, for they saw that they could not decrease the velocity of revolution of the helices, as there was now nothing to catch hold of without taking the key board down and securing it with a wrench.

This operation would consume considerable time, and before it could be accomplished the ship would go up, up, up into the frigid regions above, when they all might perish of the cold and rarity of the stifling atmosphere!

To cut the helix wires, which was the only alternative, would be twice as bad, for once the current was stopped, the air-ship would fall, and they would perish before reaching the sea below.

It was a trying position in which that simple accident of the falling image had placed them, and as they glanced blankly at each other they read in that look the utter despair both of them felt.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LOST—52,800 FEET IN THE AIR.

As the helix lever had been drawn out to its furthest limit, and there was a powerful battery on, the result naturally was that the air-ship darted upward with extraordinary velocity.

Frank shut off the action of the propellers, and left the wheel in the hands of the professor, while he dashed out to get a screw-driver and a wrench from the tool-chest below decks.

Like a cannon-ball shot from a high-pressure hydraulic gun the Greyhound sped skyward, and as the young inventor was passing the others they observed that something was amiss.

"Ain't we ascending pretty fast, Frank?" asked Howard.

"Too fast," he paused to reply.

"Why, what is up?"

"We are. But seriously, the Greyhound is running away."

"You don't say! Any danger?"

"We may burst through into heaven quite sud-

denly if I don't manage to stop our flight somehow, Harry."

"Serious, eh? Can I aid you?"

"Not in the least. But a word of advice to you."

"Well, drive ahead; I'm listening."

"Get all hands under cover as soon as possible in the cabin, and I will turn on heat so that none of you will freeze to death. We may get beyond the height at which man can live if I don't stop the Greyhound in time. That is when our danger will commence. Go—put them on their guard."

Foreseeing that some great calamity had befallen them, but ignorant of what the catastrophe was, Harry Howard ran up to the others and informed them of what Frank said.

The young inventor soon procured his tools, and hurried back to the professor, whom he engaged at watching the mercury in the thermometer, which was rapidly falling to zero.

There was a set of instruments on the switch-board designed for measuring and gauging, and the old scientist kept them under the closest examination all the time.

"Well," said Frank, attacking the screws in the board, "how are we going, professor? I see you are observing the indicators."

"There is a marked difference between our ascent and the fall of a parachute, which would go down only two feet per second. We are going up at the rate of one thousand feet a minute from our former elevation of eight hundred feet."

"And what elevation have we now attained?"

"Just four thousand five hundred feet, and as there are 5,280 feet to a mile, we lack 780 feet to attain that distance, but at our present rate of ascent it will only occupy half a minute, or about fifty-four seconds, to attain the first mile."

"I must work quickly or we may perish."

"True, Frank. A voltaic pile at the earth without a condenser would work well, and give one degree to the electrometer, if it consisted of sixty couples of silver and zinc, the barometer would mark about twenty-eight inches, the thermometer about seventy degrees, and the air would be dense and easily breathed. The pile now gives only five-sixths of a degree to the same electrometer, but the galvanic flame is more active than at earth."

"What is that—the sun?" asked Frank, glancing up as he worked on to get at the stump of the broken lever.

It was really the sun they saw through the upper mists, looking like a white ball, and as if it was shorn of his power, while under the horizontal plain below their horizon and at an angular distance from the plane equal to that of the sun above it, they saw a second sun, which resembled the actual sun reflected in a sheet of water.

This second sun was merely an optical delusion formed by the reflected sun's rays on the horizontal faces of the crystals floating in a high cloud ranging above the Greyhound.

The professor explained the phenomena. Frank went on with his work, and having fastened all the remaining levers, he got the switch-board off the wall.

Seizing the stump of the helix lever with the wrench, he made an effort to drag it out of the slot into which it was jammed, when to his dismay he found that it was bent in the hole, and remained perfectly immovable.

As long as it remained in, the air-ship was bound to ascend, and he saw that the only way in which it could be secured would be to heat the iron with a blow-pipe, hammer it straight with a cold chisel, and then withdraw it.

This work would occupy many valuable minutes, and all the while the runaway Greyhound would keep on mounting.

"It is getting cold," he exclaimed. "Fearfully cold!"

"We have attained a height of 25,400 feet," said the old professor, keenly eying the displaced indicator. "In other words, we are exactly five miles above the level of the sea."

"I see that the thermometer is ten degrees below zero."

"And the rarefaction of the air is becoming troublesome, Frank."

They both experienced an illness throughout their systems, an increasing buzzing in their ears, pains, dilated chests, quickened pulse, swelled lips, bleeding at the eyes, and the life fluid running to their heads made their hats seem to fit too tight.

"A strange lethargy begins to steal over me," said Frank.

"Fight it off—it is a death-trance—a fatal sleepiness, my boy."

Near the earth the atmosphere had been perfectly pure; up at the elevation they were at it assumed a gray, misty look, the dazzling brightness of the sun was diminished, as was its heat, and the beautiful blue sky began to deepen into a dark purple.

There was extreme difficulty in breathing, and all the metal work became so cold it would have

burnt the hands to have touched any of it without first covering the part touched.

By sheer force of will Frank shook off the deadly coma that filled him with an intense longing to lie right down, abandon all volition and go fast asleep, for he knew, in a confused way, that should he do so all would perish.

It depended solely upon him to save their lives—he must not give up—and he rushed out to get the tools he needed to finish his task of salvation. The air-ship was lost in the sky!

All was deathly still—fearfully quiet in those remote regions, in which not even the highest flying birds could live.

Below, the earth had faded from sight, while around the air-ship floated clouds of fine, needle-like, icy particles, and through the dark immensity of space glowed the stars very vividly.

Up, up, went the Greyhound, traversing an unknown track in our atmospheric envelope, darting into awful regions never cleft by man before, and still going upward.

The Greyhound seemed immobile, and the vast masses of clouds seemed to precipitate themselves down upon the earth, but in reality the matter was caused by the immobility of the floating clouds, and the rapid ascent of the air-ship.

It is alleged that no one can become dizzy up in an aerostat, as to get in that condition one must see something on his own level, and as there is nothing on a level with the air-ship to measure the motion of the vessel by, no dizziness can result. But in this connection it appears that the clouds are left out of the question, for on their level they appear as solid as they do from earth, and range along different stratas of atmosphere at different heights, which would be quite sufficient to give rise to dizziness and thereby overcome the aforesaid theory.

When Frank came staggering back to the pilot-house, he did not see any signs of the rest of his passengers, and therefrom deducted that they had retired to the cabin with Barney, who had been called up from the battery room.

Heat had been turned into the room, so that they couldn't yet be suffering as Frank and the doctor were, exposed to the raw air.

He groped his way back and found the doctor lying on the floor of the pilot-house immovable, rigid and soundly sleeping.

It was impossible to awaken him, as he was stupefied, and Frank's courage and determination were called into full play to fight off the intolerable desire he had to emulate the doctor's example.

He did not give in, though, yet each second the bitter cold was intensifying, his face became swollen, his limbs stiff, his breath stentorian, and his mind enfeebled.

He was bleeding at the mouth, nose, eyes and ears, and could hardly move, his mind in a whirl, and he fought hard to retain his flagging faculties.

Everything around him was getting intensely dark.

He crawled into the pilot-house, summoned up all his nerve, and chokingly attacked the broken lever stump.

It seemed ages to him as he worked, but only minutes passed, and he suddenly fell down on his knees.

"Thank God!" he hoarsely gasped.

His almost rigid fingers clutched the wrench in a desperate grip, and the straightened stump was jerked out partly.

He fixed his glance upon the indicator.

It marked 52,800 feet—ten miles—above the sea! It was terrible! Such a height had never before been attained.

The thermometer registered forty degrees below zero and froze—the other instruments failed to act, and intense darkness surrounded the air-ship.

Warmly wrapped up as he was, a chill struck his very heart.

He groaned, and still clutching the stump lever, he fainted.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE APPROACH OF A DARK MESSENGER.

THE ascent of the Greyhound at the rate of one thousand feet per minute had occupied just fifty-two minutes, but her fall was at the rate of two thousand feet a minute at an angle, and in a rotary motion, thus occupying twenty-six minutes to bring her down to eight hundred feet of the sea again.

At one mile's height the temperature was forty degrees, and at the dew point thirty-eight; at five miles the temperature was minus five degrees, and the dew point minus thirty-six, and at ten miles the cold measured forty below zero, and the air was so dry that no humidity could be registered.

The navigators had experienced a sudden failure of the optic nerve, and a numbness and muscular loss of vitality.

At twenty-two thousand feet a clap of thunder

from the storm had been distinctly heard, and at seven miles it was seen that cirrus clouds were not composed of water as other clouds are.

This was merely the science of their experience. Despite the heat filling the cabin, all the rest had been prostrated, but when they came down to their original altitude the doctor was the first to recover his senses.

He got up feeling as if pins and needles were going through him, and saw Frank lying on the floor beside him, totally unconscious, but still rigidly grasping the wrench that held the stump of the lever in an unrelaxing hold.

They were over the trackless sea, no land in sight, all trace of the storm gone, and daylight breaking in the eastern sky low down on the horizon.

The Greyhound was covered with a thick frost, and all the glasses had cracked, while here and there the steel plates had done the same thing.

But the machinery was working properly, and after the doctor had regulated the helices and propellers he procured a bottle of whisky and made an effort to revive Frank.

The rapid transition from the rarified atmosphere into the denser air had done much to resuscitate him, though, and the professor had not been at him long when he recovered.

"The helix lever!" gasped Frank in frantic tones as he struggled to his feet. "Drag it out! Drag it out!"

"Hush! Calm yourself, my boy. It is all right."

"Ah! Doctor Vaneyke—is it possible—"

"You have saved us, Frank."

"Then we have descended?"

"Exactly, and are traveling smoothly in safe quarters."

"Thank Heaven for that. But the others?"

"I will see to them if you are well enough to mind the wheel."

"Oh, yes. I'm faint—dizzy—sick; but I can do it."

"Then I'll return in a few minutes."

And so saying the professor hurried out and made his way aft, where he found the rest in much better condition than he and Frank had been, owing to the heat keeping them warm when up at that fearful height.

He told them what they had passed through, and they all came out on deck, while he returned to Frank and found the youth almost himself again.

An examination of the Greyhound exposed the fearful racking she got by being contracted and expanded so fearfully in the two extremes of temperature into which she had been so violently dashed; but it was seen that the damage need not necessarily interfere with her operations.

When the sun was up, and all hands were entirely recovered from their rough usage, Frank took an observation of the sun, and found that they were exactly three hundred miles out from the Great Barrier Reefs.

"Since our last troubles," said he to Harry Howard, "I find that she does not work as well as she formerly did. The Leyden jar battery did not avail me for the reason that I did not put on enough, and the bearings of the wheels are worn out by the grit from the sandstorm we encountered coming over, coupled with the tension brought to bear upon them by the weight of the ballast we carry."

"But you have no fear of her foundering again before we reach the Pacific slope of America, have you?"

"It is hard to say, in the condition she is now in."

"Such an event would end us."

"All we can do in future is to keep within a safe distance of the sea, so that if any accidents occur, we could get down in a hurry; and if the ship has to be abandoned, I've got a large, portable boat stowed away on board by means of which we might save ourselves."

It was rather a gloomy outlook, but there was no way to get out of it, and Howard made up his mind that they would have to run their chances on a kind Providence.

"She goes slower, doesn't she?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Very much; at only half her former speed. You see she has had some pretty hard usage, Howard."

"But couldn't you increase her speed by the use of the sails you utilized when on the water?"

"Not in the least," replied Frank, with a smile.

"You must understand the difference between aerostation and ship sailing. Exposing canvas up here to the wind, the ship would be rent to pieces as its propellers would be driving it one way while the wind might be struggling to force it off at an angle with the direction traveled. 'In the case of a ship's sailing, there are two forces operating, namely, the active force of the wind and the passive force of water's resistance. It is by working these powers one against the other that the ship can be navigated in any direction. In aerial navi-

gation there is only one force—the wind—and no point of support by the use of which to use it; therefore, once in the wind with sails, we must obey the wind to guide us. Galien, in 1755, imagined that the air was divided in two stratas, the lower denser than the upper, and that an air-ship once raised into the higher air, would float on the heavier lower air as a ship being filled with air will float on the heavier water."

The voyagers spent a watchful day gliding along a few hundred feet above the ocean's level, but as the evening came on, a new cause for apprehension suddenly appeared.

It was a small black cloud that rolled up on the horizon, and growing bigger each moment, it gradually began to overspread the sky with an ominous aspect.

"There is a big storm off yonder, Frank," said the professor uneasily, as he pointed at the darkening sky, "which is gradually gathering its forces together and sweeping toward us as if it might burst by the time it gets here."

"No sooner do we get out of one trouble than we are into another," said Frank gloomily. "In the condition the Greyhound is now in, many of her plates cracked and her machinery out of order, if once we are swept down in the sea she would leak like a sieve, and we'd sink."

"You are despondent, my boy."

"I am not losing courage, doctor—I never do."

"Then why are you so cast down in spirits?"

"Because I've got a strong foreboding of impending trouble."

"Nonsense! Don't let such a chimera worry you."

"Can't help my premonition, sir, by any means."

"You have grave fears, then?"

"The very worst a man could entertain."

"And they are—"

"That this invention of mine, like all the rest, is doomed."

"Bosh! You have got the blues badly."

"Perhaps. Yet I am thoroughly convinced that the storm which is coming down upon us is going to ruin the air-ship."

"Then for Heaven's sake do not tell the others, and scare them, but let us make preparations for every emergency."

The doctor's suggestion was carried out, and as the night crept on, the wind arose to a northeast gale, and a pall-like blackness settled down upon everything.

Muttering thunder rumbled and rolled in the distance, each clap seeming to draw nearer the Greyhound, while ever and anon a vivid flash of lightning tore through the dark sky.

The electrical apparatus became exceedingly affected by the electrified air, but the ship went steadily on her course.

The clocks struck seven.

It seemed to be a magical signal to the storm king, for the heaped-up clouds burst over the doomed Greyhound as the last silvery tinkle sounded, and with the roar of a thousand battery of artillery the thunder burst forth.

Again and again the hoarse and echoing booming pealed out, accompanied by glaring tongues of zig-zagging lightning that split the murky sky like a cleaver.

Then the rain descended in torrents.

Beaten down, the air-ship drove along over the pitching and tumbling waves of the sea, until with a deafening explosion an electric bolt flew down from the sky, struck the steel hull, and enveloped in an electrical glare of a strange color, the Greyhound was dashed down further and plunged in the sea.

CHAPTER XL.

THE STORM-KING'S REVELS.

THE storm that burst upon the Greyhound promised to be one of the most severe Frank Reade, Jr., had ever experienced.

Everybody but the young inventor and Dr. Vaneyke had gone into the cabin to be out of the way of danger, but Frank and the old scientist remained in the pilot-house, not daring to trust the air-ship to the management of any one else.

Struck by the lightning-bolt and beaten down into the sea three hundred miles from land, the racked air-ship was in a most pitiful condition.

She leaked through the cracks in her steel plates, and the rough weather came in through the broken glasses.

The fiery illumination wrought by the lightning came from the electric fluid, saturating the thin steel plates of which the vessel had been built, and as it communicated with the charged wires running all over the ship from the accumulator-jars, there had been a sudden loss of power.

This suspension of the motive and suspensory force had left the Greyhound disabled momentarily, thus causing her to plunge down into the raging sea.

The electric lights were suddenly extinguished.

That made the surrounding gloom seem to intensify.

Caught by the roaring mountainous waves, she was buffeted about like a cork for a few moments, shipping a vast quantity of water, and lying as helpless as a log.

"We are gone!" gasped the doctor in alarm. "No! No!" replied Frank, desperately. "See—the weird glow of the lightning is dying out, and when the batteries are relieved of the interference of the wandering electricity, we will mount above the waves again, doctor."

"Ah! I see the indicators show animation now." "Those signs returning assure me of our security."

"Security! In this gale! It can only be temporary."

"Ay! but we need only one assurance."

"What is that?"

"Why, that the worst of the storm is gone."

"It will take a long time to pass over."

"Assuredly. But we must fight it until it does."

"But even then we will be worse off than now."

"Battered, no doubt, but better able to live on the sea."

"You apprehend yet the loss of the Greyhound?"

"With all candor I do."

"Then we need a calmer sea to live in your portable boat."

"Decidedly. That is what I am aiming at."

"Here—help me with the wheel: it is too much for me."

"By Jove! it does wrench hard!"

"Pull that lever, Frank, to put the pump in motion."

"Ah, yes; the hold must be inundated with sea water."

"There goes the last of that grotesque glow."

"And the Greyhound is getting in motion."

"I can hear the helices buzzing."

"And we are rising, doctor."

"What a relief to my mind!"

"Do you observe how the wind keeps pushing us down?"

"Readily. But our heavy golden ballast has something to do with that, I am afraid, Frank," said the old gentleman.

Glare after glare of lightning lit up the sky, followed by continuous claps of thunder as the air-ship arose again.

She seemed to leap up and shake the brine from her hull, but only to be drenched as badly by the falling rain.

Up she shot among the low hanging storm clouds before Frank was well aware of it, and the electric search light blazing out ahead again showed him that the air-ship was in the midst of a monstrous cloud, toward which another cloud was rushing with appalling velocity.

"Up, up! Higher!" shouted the professor, grasping the helix-lever and pulling it out further.

"The two clouds will meet in a moment and lightning will fly out of them in all directions as soon as they do!"

Aloft darted the Greyhound.

Then there came a heavy booming that nearly deafened them as the air-ship shot through the black vapor, and a huge spark flew from the edge of the meeting clouds, with an appalling report it burst, and myriads of brilliant, dazzling sparks shot in all directions, some vanishing in space and others forming in streaks that whizzed off at a tangent.

It seemed as if a thousand luminous arcs circled all around the attractive steel hull of the air-ship, and those that touched it knocked pieces out of an alarming size, sending them ground to such a fine dust that a microscope could hardly show the particles, and turned to a different color down in the circumambient air where it vanished.

As quickly as the flashes came they too disappeared, and only the solitary glare of the search light went out over the black void that stretched off ahead of the navigators into the most infinite space that extends away between the stars.

Frank and the doctor were as cool and calculating in the face of their awe-inspiring danger as if they were safe ashore.

"It is wonderful!" gasped the doctor.

"What can exist beyond us in that dark realm," Frank muttered, "that the lightning travels to seek?"

"A strange world, perhaps."

"But man will never see it physically."

"Grade the universe this way: burrowing reptiles inhabit the center of the globe, sustaining all its pressure, next higher the deep sea fishes hold up the ocean's weight, then mankind bears the burden of the atmosphere, after which we find birds at a higher plane. Now, beyond our belt of atmosphere might not another class of living beings dwell, sustaining the rare air intervening between us and the planets?"

Frank did not reply to this deep conjecture, for he found that though the fierce violence of the wind current below the storm clouds was lessened

at the altitude they were in, yet there was another strata of storm piling up above them.

"We must descend!" he exclaimed.

"Ah! More of Jove's playthings above us, eh?"

"It would not do to get caught in those clouds."

"By no means. They have a sinister look."

"Much worse than the ones below us, I think."

"True, my boy. Run the risk of descending again."

This advice was hardly necessary for a sheet of wind and rain swept down upon the tossing air-ship, and beat her from her plane to a lower strata of air below the first series of storm clouds over the sea.

Hail stones as big as walnuts came showering upon the ill-fated ship, pelting her with the rattling sound of musketry in an army engagement, and as the pressure on the helices was reduced, the Greyhound darted down in circles again to within a hundred yards of the billows.

The din that came up from the angry sea struck terror to their souls, and the leaping and surging waves mounted to an enormous height as if eagerly anxious to drag the airship into their embrace and carry her down to the mythical caverns of mermaids on the bed of the sea.

A flash came again, and a huge fire ball struck the after part of the ship, showing Frank in the momentary glare the dismantled hull of a wrecked schooner driven along on the water below at the mercy of the wind and the waves.

But scarcely had he observed this sad sight when there sounded an explosion of the fire ball, near the cabin, and the door was flung open, a shriek pealed out above the din of the warring elements, and May Blossom rushed out on deck.

Only an instant the frightened girl stood, and then a violent lurch of the hull knocked her down and sent her rolling over to the lee railing.

She arose, and seizing a dangling rope, she made an effort to steady herself, when another fierce roll of the Greyhound whirled her off into space from the deck!

In the cabin doorway stood Harry Howard, the picture of mute despair, while in back of him crowded Barney, Pomp and Matt Mainbrace, looking out.

Frank had seen the accident, and leaving the wheel in the hands of Doctor Vaneyke, he dashed out to the spot where the girl had disappeared.

He waited for a succeeding flash of lightning to come, and then he saw that one end of the rope was fastened to a ring bolt on the railing, while the other end hung over the side, and the girl a dozen yards below the ship, was clinging to it.

"May!" shouted Harry Howard frantically, as he rushed out on deck.

"Stand back!" cried Frank. "I will save her!"

The next moment he was beside the rope to which the girl was clinging, and seized hold of it outside the railing.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LOSS OF THE GREYHOUND.

It was as much as Frank could do, with the tempest swaying the ship so violently, to retain his footing on deck.

But he braced himself against the railing, and gaining a firm hold upon the rope to which the girl was clinging, he began to haul it up, when Harry Howard joined him.

"Go back!" gasped Frank. "You will be blown overboard!"

"No! I must stay and help you, Reade!"

"I can manage alone."

"Nevertheless, I won't go!"

"Obstinate!"

"No! I love her. If she perishes so shall I!"

"Then take hold with me!"

Howard eagerly complied, and shouted wildly:

"May! May! Keep hold of the rope!"

"Hurry!" came the faint reply.

"Courage! You shall not, must not die!"

Hand over hand they drew up the rope, until at last the half fainting girl's arms came in reach, when Frank stooped over, caught hold of her, and lifted her upon the deck.

She fell into Howard's arms, half stupefied.

"How came she to run out?" asked Frank.

"A fire-ball struck the cabin roof, and exploded, frightening her."

"Did it do any danger?"

"The roof is all torn off, and a part of the floor planking of the cabin has been ripped away with the wires."

"That is bad. Tell Barney to go down below and get the boat out in readiness for use, if need be."

"Are we in such danger as that?"

"There is no knowing what to expect."

"By Jove, this storm is a terror!"

"The worst I ever experienced. Go!"

Howard wasted no more time in idle talk, but left Frank with the thunder roaring and the sheet

lightning blazing around him, while he carried the girl back into the cabin.

"She had a narrow escape," Frank muttered grimly, as he made his way back to the pilot house with extreme difficulty, "but she is a courageous creature, and had sense enough to hold on to the rope until we secured her."

He found the professor struggling hard with the wheel, and told him what had just occurred.

"I'm afraid the storm is increasing, Frank," said the doctor.

"That is bad. It is bad enough now."

"And your prediction stands a good chance to come true."

"You begin to think we cannot save the ship, eh?"

"She is in such a dilapidated condition the chances are all against her fighting through this storm."

"I just sent Barney word to prepare the boat for use."

"A wise provision."

"Hark! What is that?"

"A fearful snapping noise!"

"Look! The wires are all surcharged by the electricity in the air, and are becoming luminous. That is a bad omen."

"And the snapping noise we hear is produced by the weakest wires breaking! The end has come! The currents of electricity are fairly rotting, or softening, or melting them!"

"Shall I apprise the others?"

"You may as well, to be prepared."

Frank shouted through the cabin speaking tube, and the rest were informed of the danger menacing them.

"The Greyhound proceeds slower," observed the doctor, "and I notice that the helices are losing strength—diminishing the numbers of their revolutions, Frank."

"You are right, doctor. Hal! listen to that!"

It was a fearful peal of thunder directly over their heads, and the air-ship trembled like an aspen with the shock.

The accompanying blaze of lightning lit up the sea for many miles around, and they once more saw the wretched wreck laboring in the seas beneath them.

Great waves were making breaches over her, and at one instant she was engulfed, while at the next she rose up out of the brine and was tossed along again.

The sight was one of awful grandeur.

After that enormous peal of thunder died away, the flashing lightning became almost incessant, and the Greyhound was constantly outlined in the blinding glow like some unfortunate bird swept out of its latitude.

"And here is the last cause of alarm which I have been looking for quite awhile," said the doctor suddenly.

"I am prepared for anything, professor. What is it?"

"Our power is diminishing fast."

"Then we are sinking?"

"Look! We are driving down at the sea like a shooting star, and we may strike close to that wreck!"

"Quick, then, guide her that way!"

"What are your hopes?"

"To buoy up the air-ship with the wreck?"

"I fear it will be impossible."

"Yet it is our only salvation. Steer for it correctly."

"I will do my best, Frank."

"All hands on deck!" shouted Frank in the tube.

He saw that once they plunged into the sea, there would not be power enough in the Greyhound's batteries to raise her again, when her cracked hull would sink her.

He ran out on deck himself after he shouted to the others, and met his friends leaving the cabin, and carrying out a twenty-foot boat of Frank's construction, capable of holding all hands.

They secured it so it could not be blown away, and under Frank's directions armed themselves with ropes.

But for the coolness and nerve shown by the young inventor at that trying crisis they might have lost courage and once panic-stricken, all hope of saving their lives would be gone.

Down went the Greyhound of her own accord, the professor steering her as best he could, while Frank shouted his orders to the others.

Within a minute the air-ship struck the water with a bang that almost sent them overboard, and caught in the swinging waves she was thrown about like a feather.

Unfortunately the wreck was at least fifty fathoms away, and there was no way to reach it from the deck.

It filled Frank with dismay, for he knew that the wildly-tossing air-ship was fast filling, and as the weight of the gold would bear her down more rapidly, and the power gone from the jars and

dynamo could not work the pump, it would only be a matter of a short time for her to founder.

What was to be done?

To secure the wreck was his only hope.

He glanced keenly around in the blazing lightning, and his glance fell upon his life-boat.

"We can get a line to the wreck with that boat!" he cried, loudly, to make himself heard, "but it will leave you all exposed to the danger of going down with no reliance but life-preservers. Shall we risk it?"

There was not a dissenting voice save Pomp's, and he said he wanted to go in the boat.

"Very well. It is a risky job to attempt to get to the wreck," said Frank, "but we hold all our lives in our hands, and only prompt action can save us. I will risk my life to do it, and as Pomp is so anxious to go, he shall aid me with the oars."

The darky then tried to get out of it, but Frank was firm, and declared that he must go or get shot.

There was no gainsaying any order that was then given, and the boat was launched, a line taken, one end of which was fastened to the air-ship, and the other to the boat, and as the oars fell into the water it left the side of the fast settling air-ship, and went rolling away toward the wreck.

The boat was a marvel of strength, buoyancy and lightness, and breasted the fierce waves like a duck, although it was a fearful struggle to reach the wreck.

Not to dwell upon details, suffice it that they finally reached the dismantled schooner, the line was fastened to the stump of the mainmast, and those upon the air-ship hauling in on it, the Greyhound was dragged up alongside of the wreck.

Half a dozen stout lines were hove from the wreck to the air-ship, the electrical wires of which by this time were all ruined, and the Greyhound thus buoyed up with just her deck above the sea was secured.

She could not sink unless the lashings parted, for the wreck proved to be a derelict lumber schooner which certainly could not founder unless the waves knocked it to pieces, and washed her cargo away.

The unfortunate aeronauts then took refuge in the submerged cabin, and not finding a soul on board they concluded that the schooner had been abandoned by her crew.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE RESCUE.

ALL through that dark stormy night the furious tempest raged with unabated vigor, through the succeeding day, and far into the following night.

Crouching wet, cold, shivering and utterly miserable in the cabin of the schooner, which managed to withstand the assaults of the raging sea, the unfortunates listened to every clap of thunder with a shudder, saw every flash of lightning with dread, and heard every crushing blow the two vessels struck each other as the force of the waves separated them away and dashed them together again.

It was a time of dread and horror.

It was an experience they would never forget.

Thundering waves dashed up and made breaches over them, chasms in the trough of the sea swallowed both ships up, and the howling wind drove down tons of rain and spray over the doomed vessels in a fearful manner.

The hulls of both vessels creaked and groaned as if they were going to pieces at any moment, and the shifting cargo of the schooner threatened to knock the planking out of the wooden vessel's hull, swamp it, and cause both crafts to sink, never to rise again.

May Blossom bore up with extraordinary cour-

age, for her lover's presence, his kind encouragements, and the faith she reposed in the rest of those brave men was sublime.

Dispirited as Barney and Pomp were over their situation, it could not quell their constant growling and faint finding with each other, and the eccentric remarks of old Matt Mainbrace brought many a smile to their pale faces and cheered them up.

When the fury of the storm had somewhat abated, Frank ventured out on deck, and saw that the lashings that held both vessels together were gradually wearing away.

Turning to Pomp he said:

"Within a few hours these ropes will break, Pomp, and as there is no immediate chance for this craft to founder, we had better transfer the gold to the schooner."

"Golly, sah, yo' fink the Greyhound done gone?"

"Positively. She is a wreck, and her machinery is useless."

"Den we's got ter drif' all our libes on dis yere wreck?"

"A passing vessel may pick us up."

"Hope ter glory dat vessel 'peah mighty soon."

Frank called the rest out and stated his fears, whereupon they all set to work with a will, and transferred all the gold, eatables and water to the schooner, along with all valuables they wished to save.

Within an hour after this was done the lashings parted and the Greyhound sank beneath the ocean like a shot.

That was the end of her!

Frank uttered an intense sigh of deep regret.

"It is too bad after all the work I did on her," he muttered. "But the time will come when I will eclipse her with a greater invention to startle the scientific world."

The schooner had been heeled over by the drag of the air-ship at her port side, but righted herself and rode on an even keel when the Greyhound sunk.

The following day dawned bright and clear, and a signal of distress was raised on a pole extemporized out of several oars lashed together.

The deck part of the rolling derelict dried out, but the water in the hold came up to the hold beam.

A huge hole had been stove in the side by some unknown means, and they found that the name of the wreck was the "Sarah N. Cringle, of Sydney."

Several days passed uneventfully by, the unlucky navigators making themselves as comfortable as they could under the circumstances, and a sharp lookout was constantly kept up in search of a passing vessel.

Nearly a week passed by without a sign of a friendly sail coming in sight, and the unfortunates gradually recovered their strength and spirits after the trying ordeals through which they passed.

The sea remained unruined and calm—a cool, pleasant breeze blowing and a clear blue sky overhead brightening up the sea wondrously.

There was no means of ascertaining their location, as the nautical instruments were lost in the wreck.

At the end of the sixth day Frank was pacing up and down the deck, when Barney came running up from below excitedly, and approached him.

"Masther Frank, sor!" he exclaimed.

"Well, what is the matter?" asked Frank.

"We're agoin' ter sink afther all, bejabbers!"

"What! How can it be possible?"

"Shure an' it's pokin' down in the wather hold, I wuz, whin what shud I see but daylight aschtramin' in along the garboords, an' it didn't take me long fur to say that ther rackin' this ship got has weakened her timbers an' plankin' from ther keel."

"By Jove!"

"An' but ther laist taste av a knockin' around agin will dhrove ther keel completely out av her, whin begob it's apart she may fall aschpillin' us inther ther say ter schwill back to Ameriky!"

Here was an unforeseen danger looming up again, but to satisfy himself Frank followed Barney down, and saw that he had told the truth.

He thereupon went up on deck again, and was about to apprise the rest, when he heard Harry Howard shout:

"Sail, ho—sail, ho!"

How that cry electrified all of them!

They rushed up forward, joining Harry in the bow where he stood, and Frank withheld his information in order not to dampen their joyous spirits.

Afar in the distance a steamer hove in sight, and Matt Mainbrace danced an extemporaneous horn-pipe, hithed up his trowsers and shouted:

"Hooray—hooray! By golly I knowed as thar wuz a sweet little cherub wot sets up aloft ter watch over poor Jack Tar."

The steamer must have sighted them, for it came directly toward them, and in due course arrived within hailing distance, and to the wrecked navigators' surprise they saw that she was the Reindeer.

"The steamer we descended on coming over at the time of the mutiny," said Frank, "and she is bound for San Francisco. By Jove! fortune favors us at last! And it is about time! We are saved!"

"And the gold, too!" added May Blossom.

"Why, I could almost dance for joy myself!" said the doctor.

A moment later there came a hail from the steamer.

"Ship ahoy—ahoy—ahoy!"

"Reindeer ahoy!" shouted Frank.

"What is the matter—a wreck?"

"Ay! a derelict. Take us aboard!"

The steamer hauled to, and a boat was lowered.

When it reached the wreck matters were explained to the captain, who came on board, causing him no end of amazement, and he readily consented to carry them and the gold back to California.

Accordingly the transfer was made, the wreck was abandoned, and with happy hearts they steamed away homeward-bound with all the gold saved.

An uneventful voyage across the Pacific followed, and when they reached San Francisco and disembarked, the gold and precious stones were sold, and the proceeds divided, when each of them received a much larger amount than they expected to get.

The captain of the Reindeer was amply rewarded, and ere Harry Howard and May Blossom left San Francisco they were married in the presence of all their fellow voyagers.

The whole party then went eastward by train, and at Chicago, Howard, his wife and Matt Mainbrace, parted with the rest and returned to New York, where Harry was bound to vindicate himself of the charge of killing Ralph Despard.

Frank, Dr. Vanoyke, Barney and Pomp, then went to Readstown, and finding that his father and family had returned from their trip they had taken before Frank set out, he gave them an account of his adventures in the Greyhound.

None the worse for trouble, and with additional riches to compensate them, our friends were safely home again, and thus we must regretfully leave them for awhile.

But in conclusion it may be said that of all the remarkable adventures they had passed through during the course of their lives, they would never forget the thrilling escapes they had with the Greyhound of the Air.

[THE END.]

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